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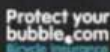
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Best in class

A surprise winner for Bike of the Year 2015 — but it's well-deserved

Every bike test in **mbr** is a source of endless debate

while we weigh up a huge number of variables. Which is best — the bike with the most potential or the one that comes perfectly spec'd straight out of the box? How do you weigh up the bang-for-your buck of a direct-sales brand against the try-before-you-buy benefits of companies with support from local bike shops?

Our Bike of the Year competition is even harder to call. It's easy enough to build a shortlist from the best bikes that we've tested over the last 12 months, but picking an overall winner is far from easy.

Over the years we've had all kinds of different winners, and plenty of controversy. In 2013 it was a £600 hardtail, the VooDoo Bizango 29er, that took top honours — and launched a heap of emails questioning whether a budget bike could really be the year's 'best'.

If you turn to page 70, you'll see why this year I'm braced for a similar response. But the fact is, we test heaps of bikes, and we know what to expect at any given price range. If we test a bike that blows those expectations away, and sets a new standard in its sector, well... the decision isn't so hard after all.

finn

Editor, **mbr**



2015's toughest test: not for the easily impressed



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Turn to page 54



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Big picture

Trees aren't just useful for climbing up to take photos, they do a great job of sheltering some of the best trails on the planet. Out in the open, trails are subject to the full force of the weather, but under a leafy canopy they tend to take on a softer, less weathered feel, while the trunks themselves provide solid, immovable reasons why you *have* to make that corner. The mountainous country of Slovenia is the third most forested in Europe, which is good news for mountain bikers! Read more on p84.

Roo Fowler



Big picture

Sometimes it's so sweet to be proved wrong; a recent trip to Alpe d'Huez being a case in point. I've been there quite a few times for the Megavalanche, and thought I'd ridden most of the best trails, but thanks to a local guide, Charlie Garcin, the area dished up some of the most awesome, fun riding ever. Smashing leaves out of the way on unused footpaths, or just soaking in the late evening sun in spectacular scenery, it's the best trip I've had this year, and it proved there's a lot more beyond the Mega if you know where to look.

Mick Kirkman





Big picture

In the tectonic upheaval that annexed Iberia from the rest of Europe, the resulting Pyrenees got all the glory. But at the same time, generations of layered seabed were upturned onto the Basque coast to create unique patterns of vertical strata, and a playground for those riders with huge stones of their own. Taking a dangerous line here is Doug McDonald of Basque MTB on his Orbea Rallon.

Daniel Wilkey



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The Buzz

START YOUR RIDE HERE

Edited by Jamie Darlow

GEAR

RIDES

FAST & FIT

INSPIRATION

GET STARTED

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“WE PASS A SCULPTURE OF A BEARDED MAN, FOLLOWED BY A FIELD FULL OF HEMP”

Riding high in Slovenia, page 84



BELLY DANCING

BikePark Wales opens the longest blue trail in the UK, for those who can stomach it

To celebrate its second birthday, BikePark Wales has opened the longest blue descent in the land. Terry's Belly, as it has been christened (after one of BPW director Rowan Sorrell's digger drivers), takes a meandering 4.2km route along the southern fringe of the park, close to the acclaimed 50 Shades of Black. And boy is it long. Consider this: the Fort William downhill track is only 2.6km, and even the popular Chavannes

descent in Les Gets runs out of elevation after 3.1km. Best of all, it feels every inch of its length, with dizzying turns, berms and undulations.

The trail builders have done a great job of maintaining the flow; there's little need for more than a cursory pedal stroke, and a gentle brush of the brakes. If that sounds like an amble through the woods, you'll be in for a shock. At around seven minutes for a non-stop run from

the top, your upper body gets a hard workout from pumping all those berms and rollers. Terry's Belly also takes you on a journey through the varied Welsh landscape, beginning in open clear fell with expansive views, before plunging into dark forest and sweeping through native oak woodland. Whether you're a beginner or expert, you're served up a hearty portion of Welsh singletrack. We suggest you tuck in while it's hot.

A STAR IS (RE)BORN

DMR reinvents the much-loved Trailstar

The DMR Trailstar was a bike that defined a generation. It was simple, it was versatile and it was affordable, and during the late Nineties and early Noughties it could be found up and down the land tearing up trails, boosting off dirt jumps and carving up 4X tracks. Now it's back, with a contemporary twist, but still based on the same mandate of providing hassle-free kicks.

Although the new 4130 cro-mo frame is configured around 650b wheels and a 140-150mm fork, it's compatible with new Plus size tyre options. As standard, it will accept up to 2.8in tyres, and optional Swopout dropouts will let you extend the chainstays by 8mm to accommodate 3.0in rubber. Hell, you could even run 29in wheels if that's your cup of Earl Grey.

Internal cable routing for a 31.6mm dropper post also makes a welcome appearance, as do ISCG05 mounts, a threaded BB shell and a tapered head tube. It's available in three sizes (S, M, L) and two colours (Stealth Black and Throwback Blue), all for the almost 1997 price of £499.99. Keep an eye out for a First Ride soon.

650b wheels with Plus size tyre options up to 3.0in, thanks to extendable chainstays that grow the back end by 8mm

Designed to take a 140-150mm fork: Olly Wilkins's build uses an X-Fusion Sweep

Retro 4130 crommo steel frame with modern luxuries: internal dropper post routing, ISCG05 mounts, threaded BB shell and a tapered head tube

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

Magicshine's new Eagle light

In the past, we've had a love-hate relationship with lights from the Far East: usually ludicrously cheap, and delivering big lumens, but sometimes unreliable and poorly made. With its new Eagle M2, Chinese brand Magicshine is redefining our perception. It's a light that dishes out 2,400 lumens, carries a 12-month warranty and still only costs £100. Sounds like love at first sight.

Magicshine doesn't scrimp on the details — decent straps and mounts for bar and helmet, battery level indicator, and a remote button to turn it on and alter the power. Time will tell if it lives up to the hype. We have a lights group test next month to see if the beam pattern works and if it meets the claimed full power run-time of two hours. magicshineuk.co.uk



3 MORE SKINNY BIKES THAT GOT FATTER...

SCOTT GENIUS

Scott's full-suspension trail bike is offered in 29in, 650b and 650b Plus versions. The Plus bikes use the front triangle from the 29er mated to a wider Boost rear end. Travel mirrors the 29er model at 130mm rear, but you get a 140mm-travel fork.

MONDRAKER CRAFTY

Only a year old, Mondraker's Crafty swaps its 29in wheels for 650b Plus in 2016. The 130mm-travel trail bike still gets Mondraker's pioneering Forward Geometry and Zero suspension design, and two models are available: the R+ and RR+.

CHARGE COOKER

Charge has made a wholesale commitment to Plus size wheels for 2016. All of its Cooker hardtail range (barring two fat bikes) get 2.8in WTB Trailblazer tyres mated to 40mm wide rims.



NEW HOPE

The R2i LED is new from Hope, a self-contained light with battery and lamp in a beautiful, machined alloy body. It's powerful, with 1,400 lumens (1,000 measured) from two LEDs. There's a bayonet mount for handlebar or helmet use and there's a readout to show how much juice you've got. It costs £185 and you can also get it as a separate light and battery pack with a wired connection.

hopetech.com



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01 SADDLE

Are we sitting comfortably? If not, begin with a new saddle, like the Fabric Scoop. It's a great all-rounder with enough padding to cosset your behind.

£40, fabric.cc

02 BRAKE PADS

You don't have to get down to the metal backing for brake pads to fail; they pick up contaminants and wear unevenly too. Replace with Superstar organic pads.

£5.49, superstarcomponents.com

03 FRESH CLEATS

New cleats can return SPD shoes to their former glory, bringing

back that positive connection and making you feel faster.

£11.99, madison.co.uk

04 GEAR CABLES AND OUTER

Cables stretch over time and water and grit can get inside the outer too, making even the poshest of shifters clunky. Swap them out for a Shimano mtb gear cable set.

£12.49, madison.co.uk

05 ROTOR POWER

If your brakes still lack bite after replacing the pads you may need to up-size your rotors. Box-fresh trail bikes typically arrive with a 160mm disc at the rear; try

upgrading to 180mm.

£26.99, madison.co.uk

06 PLASTIC PEDALS

A good set of flat pedals costs around £100 but slash that spending with these El Plastique pedals from Superstar. You get grippy pins, a stiff body and a light 334g weight.

£24.99, superstarcomponents.com

07 CHAIN RETENTION

A noisy chain is a distraction, but a chain that leaps off the ring and gets jammed in the BB is serious. Get a dangle-type chain retention device like Bionicon's C-Guide.

£23.99, velobrand.co.uk

HOT STUFF

WHAT WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT THIS MONTH

*MOST
WANTED*

GOPRO HERO4 SESSION £329.99

The new Hero4 Session is the smallest and lightest GoPro yet. This 35mm cube is roughly half the size of the current Hero4 and about 40 per cent lighter. The reason GoPro has been able to save so much weight is because the new Session is fully waterproof, so doesn't need a protective plastic housing.

With no case to muffle the sound, the audio quality on the Session is much better too. It also uses a new Dual Mic system to help reduce wind noise, a common problem with riding footage. Instead this system senses wind noise and automatically switches from the front to a rear-mounted microphone.

There is a small LCD screen on top of the camera that records run time and lets you know how many pictures you've taken, as well as video resolution. By using the second button on the back you can pair the camera (via wifi or Bluetooth) with a phone or GoPro's optional Smart Remote. You'll need the GoPro App installed, but you can then access an expanded set of controls and use the phone as a viewfinder.

Some video and image quality has been sacrificed though; the Session only captures video in 1080p 60fps, 720p 100fps and 1440p 30fps, and shoots eight megapixel photos. This is compared to the current Hero4, which boasts 4k video and 12k image quality.

The Session comes with a protective frame, which is compatible with existing GoPro mounts and hardware. It doesn't, however, have a removable battery, which means you won't be able to simply plug in a spare, like you can with the current Hero4 model.

Being lighter and smaller, the new Session is far less obtrusive, especially on an open face helmet, but we're not sure how the textured rubber surface and little recesses are going to cope with dirt and mud. The Hero4 has the advantage that you can simply rinse the waterproof case under the tap after a muddy ride.

madison.co.uk





TRAIL BUILDER

Joystick's new Builder stem uses a carbon bar-friendly front clamp. The faceplate clips onto the bar before being bolted down via a gapless-style closure. Available in 35, 50 and 65mm lengths and 31.8 and 35mm clamp sizes.

£79.99, hookitproducts.co.uk



SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Rubbers is a new inner tube brand from Vancouver. And in case you didn't get the joke, a glueless patch — to double your riding pleasure — is included with every tube. Can't frown at the price though. **£5.99, hookitproducts.co.uk**



RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

Flexiseq Sport Gel is a high-tech ointment that reduces joint pain and stiffness. Some form of (Borg inspired?) nanotechnology helps the gel seep through the skin to help re-lubricate the sore joints and muscles.

£34.99 treatmentsdirect.com



HOUSE PROUD

If you don't own a garage or garden shed and have to keep your bike indoors then you need Oxford's new Protex Stretch bike cover. It stretches to fit most bikes and comes with a separate pocket for the chainset, which helps keep dirt off the carpet.

£34.99, oxprod.com



FACIAL RECOGNITION

These Soaza goggles from Shred are pricey compared to their competition, but they do feature the company's top-spec Nodistortion lens. They have excellent optical clarity with anti-fog coating and tear-off compatibility.

£105, skibartlett.com



SPIT SHIELD

Part of the Madison clothing range, this Flux softshell is fully waterproof and super breathable. It includes an under-helmet ninja hood, low-bulk cuff bindings, pit vents and silicone shoulder print to reduce pack movement. Comes in sizes S-XXL.

£114.99, madison.cc



LIGHT HEADED

Sharing the same shape as Bontrager's Rally, the Lithos helmet boasts sturdier construction, integrated sweat drainage and clip-in mounts for lights or the use of a GoPro. It also comes with a sticker kit for ultimate coordination.

£99.99, bontrager.com



HIKE OR BIKE

With an ultra-grippy Stealth rubber sole from Five Ten, and a flexible upper, the Adidas Terrex Trail Cross shoes let you scale a mountain in comfort. Better still, they'll also keep your feet firmly planted on the pedals on the way down.

£130, adidas.co.uk



50 SHADES

Crank Brothers is currently offering limited-edition colours of some of its level 3 pedals. The olive green colour of this 5050-3 may be pretty subtle, but you are unlikely to run into someone with another pair on your local trails.

£79.99, extrauk.co.uk

HATE PEOPLE, LOVE SINGLETRACK

If you like it wild and lonely you're in luck — we've found some of the most remote singletrack in Britain



BORDER RAID, CHEVIOT HILLS 35km (22 miles)



BIG CLIMB



SINGLE-TRACK

This ride starts in what feels like the middle of nowhere and tops out high on the English/Scottish border, where it can be extended into Scotland. From Alwinton (Landranger 80/NT921062), follow Clennel Street N through Kidland Forest and down to the Usway Burn. Keep N around Hazely Law to the border and follow this over Windy Gyle. At Black Braes head S into Coquetdale and at Barrowburn, head N again to Fairhaugh. Follow the road S to Shillmoor, where a bridleway cuts the corner with a final climb and descent back to Alwinton.

GPS download: po.st/border

CALDBECK FELS, LAKE DISTRICT 33km (21 miles)



STEEP



ROCKY

The northern tip of the Lakes feels remote in comparison to the southern end. And this ride has a real 'out there' feel despite a few road sections. Follow lanes N from Mosedale (Landranger 90/NY357322), and at Calebreck head W on old mining tracks. Pick up the road at Fell Side and follow it to Green Head, where a good track continues W to Longlands. Tarmac leads S over Dash Beck, and a track then follows this SE to Skiddaw House, continuing NE to finish.

GPS download: po.st/caldbeck

PETER TAVY, DARTMOOR 12km (7 miles)



TECHY



SINGLE-TRACK

This loop gets very wild, very quickly and the return run through ancient graves and standing stones is a truly unique and memorable experience. From near Peter Tavy (Landranger 201/SX522778), head up the lane and L onto a bridleway into Cuddliptown and then take the road NE, past Waspworthy. Keep W at Brousentor Farm and follow the bridleway up onto Cocks Hill. Now cross the moor, heading SW the whole time, to finish.

GPS download: po.st/tavey

NORTH HARRIS, SCOTLAND 38km (24 miles)



LONG



SCENIC

This one's 'out there' even by Scottish standards, with Harris making up some of the most westerly ground in Britain. You can start at Tarbert, but if you have a vehicle, park just off the A859 (Landranger 14/NB137034) and regain the A859 going NE then N to Aird a' Mhulaidh. N of here, on a tight bend, follow a track W to Gleann Stuladail. Here, continue S to join the road at Loch Mhiabhaig and now cruise around the coast to finish.

GPS download: po.st/harris

PRESELI HILLS, WEST WALES 24km (15 miles)



BOGGY

For a little pocket of wilderness at the very edge of Wales, look no further than the Preseli Hills. This remote ridge once carried travellers, en route to Ireland, and now makes a great place to ride. It can be accessed from the coast for a big day out, but for a more manageable version, start at the eastern end (Landranger 145/SN075295) and follow lanes through Mynachlog-ddu to Rosebush. Forest tracks lead N onto the ridge from here; just follow one westwards home.

GPS download: po.st/preseli



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WALES TO CONSULT ON RIGHT TO ROAM

New right to roam laws mean mountain bikers could be welcome on Welsh footpaths

Thousands of miles of footpaths and unriden tracks across Wales could be legally opened to mountain bikers, after the Welsh Government ordered a consultation on access rights. Under consideration is a radical change to the law, allowing open access for all to the countryside and potentially bringing in new Scottish-style right to roam legislation.

"The ideal outcome is a code where responsible access is allowed anywhere, something that will make *such* a huge difference to riding in Wales," explained Tom Hutton, part of a new consultation group called OpenMTB, which is representing mountain bikers on the issue. "That will take time and demand changing legislation though, so what we can do now is pick the low-hanging fruit to offer access more quickly."

This means land currently graded 'open access' for walkers could be unlocked to two wheels in the first stage, before footpaths become permissive for bikes too. Finally, there could be full right to roam access, as Scotland currently enjoys, Hutton explained.

Don't get too excited just yet though: a consultation proposed in 2013 died before it was even published as a Green Paper, after early opposition from landowners. Tom says the proponents are more organised now though, with OpenMTB garnering support from CTC Wales, Welsh Cycling and British Cycling.

"The big thing is to push the responsible message of mountain biking to the government, for mountain bikers to self-police and be responsible on existing multi-use trails," Tom said. Areas like Snowdon prove shared-use trails work, he said, where a voluntary riding ban exists from 10am to 5pm from the beginning of May until the end of September.

But the movement needs your help to succeed — a show of support to help the law-makers understand how important cycling is to the Welsh economy, health and way of life. OpenMTB is asking all riders, whether they live in Wales or ride there once a year on a long weekend, to write to the government and lend their support. Go to po.st/OpenMTB for a draft letter and address to send it to. The deadline for these responses is October 2, 2015.

At present, Wales has a limited right to roam allowance via the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), which lets people walk freely on mapped areas of mountain, moor, heath, downland and registered common land, without having to stick to paths... but not to cycle. With time, and a lot of work, Wales could have full open access. And where Wales leads England could follow — the arguments set out in the Green Paper apply with equal force to England too. Here's hoping.



140,000
miles of footpath
in the UK that could
one day be open
to bikes

HOW IT MIGHT WORK

Full right to roam access will take many years, OpenMTB reckons, but extending the CROW act to bikes and reclassifying footpaths for riders will happen more quickly. We think this means most tracks will be open to bikes, with sensible restrictions in some places where it's not safe, or really high walker traffic exists. So, the big question is: will it succeed? We think so, but you might have to wait a while.

Access all areas: the
right to roam could
be coming to Wales

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THE INDIGESTIBLES

Keep your energy levels high and your gut in good order by avoiding these five ride-wreckers

01 SPICY FOOD

There's a growing body of evidence suggesting spicy food is good for you, potentially helping prevent cancer and diabetes. Save it for after the ride though, as lots of fiery spice is more likely to cause heartburn and acid reflux, by irritating the lining of the oesophagus and increasing your stomach acid. Likewise, acidic foods like tomato sauce, orange juice, coffee and booze can have the same effect. So steer clear of tidying up last night's leftover curry, or dabbling in a breakfast burrito.

FLAVOUR FILLER: mbr's favourite breakfast is Lizi's low sugar granola, mixed with high protein Total yoghurt and summer berries — packed with carbs it's a pre-ride winner.

04 SUGAR SPIKE

Refined sugar seems like a good idea at first taste, giving an instant energy boost. The spike only lasts a few minutes, though, leaving you exhausted and empty. So that means no cans of Coke, no chocolate bars and no sugary cereal.

SWEET FIX: Go for unprocessed sweet food, like fresh fruit, and drink coconut water, not fizzy pop.

05 HIGH FAT

Fat takes time for your body to digest — fine if you're sitting on the sofa, not so good if you're going riding. The trouble is, both digestion and muscle power require plenty of blood, and they'll go into competition for it if they have to. So a high-fat brekkie can wreck your performance and your toilet equilibrium. Ditch the fast food breakfast and the fry-up.

LEG POWER BREAKFAST: Scrambled eggs on wholemeal toast will give your body carbs from the bread to keep you riding, and a little protein from the eggs to keep you feeling full. Add smoked salmon if you're feeling decadent.

02 FIBRE FEAST

Fibre increases the good bacteria in your gut and has a host of other benefits, like preventing heart disease, diabetes and weight gain. Keep it for after your ride though, as it can cause wind and bloating — if you've ever had that painful over-full feeling on a ride, it's probably from fibre. Avoid it in the two hours before you ride, so no beans on toast or bran flakes.

ENDURANCE LUNCH: Sandwiches work well as pre-ride food. Go for one from a healthy eating range, as they tend to be lower in fat and sugar. Alternatively, pasta and couscous dishes do the carbo-loading job too.

03 NO FOOD

Overslept and didn't have time for breakfast? Overindulged the night before and couldn't stomach breakfast? If you answer yes to one of these questions your riding is certainly going to suffer, because you'll run out of energy sooner on the trail. It's not the end of the world, you can always eat as you ride, but it's far better to start with full energy reserves.

QUICK FUEL: Instant porridge pots are quick to make and easy to wolf down, plus they have plenty of carbs. Add a potassium-rich banana to it and you've got a good hangover/recovery breakfast.



HOW WE ROLL

Expert studies of foam roller use reveals which muscle groups to target — and which to avoid

DOES FOAM ROLLING REALLY WORK?

Possibly... the evidence is mixed. A couple of studies have shown good things: that using a roller increases your range of movement and may reduce post-exercise muscle soreness for up to three days. It has also been shown to boost jumping power. However, much of the evidence is anecdotal and no quality research has been done on exactly how foam rollers are best used. Physios seem to like them though: "I use one frequently and recommend them to patients, especially cyclists and runners," says Dr Graham Theobald from thebodyrehab.co.uk. "It lets them self-manage their aches and niggles. If foam-rolling works for you — even if it's a placebo — it's worthwhile, so keep doing it."

WE'LL GIVE IT A GO THEN. WHAT DO I DO?

"Work on the gluteals [buttocks], lower back and quads for the best benefit," Dr Theobald says: "These muscles are very active in mtb, as they provide power uphill and control during changes in direction and balance."

When going downhill, the quads work hard eccentrically, stabilising the bike."

The best way is to work the muscle with the roller while it is in a functional position, and not just flaccid — so flex the hip and the knee. Don't roll the iliotibial band (ITB: you'll find it down the side of your thigh and knee, linking the hip to lower leg) as it is a tendon, not a muscle and instead roll the glutes and muscles that insert into the top of the ITB.

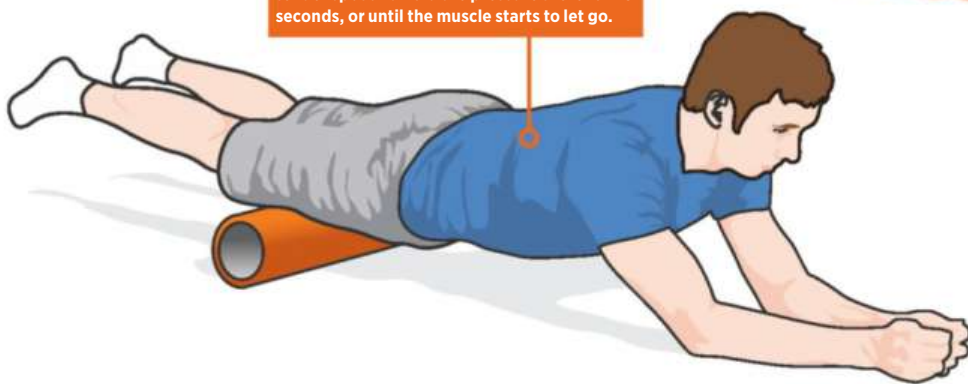
Start by lying with the target 'dough' resting on the roller. Slowly roll yourself to and fro until it feels tender and hold it for 45 seconds or until the muscle eases up and lets go. Then carry on to the next spot.

WHICH ARE THE BEST FOAM ROLLERS?

TriggerPoint's Grid is the market leader (trtherapy.com) and the Fitness Mad Vari-Massage roller (fitness-mad.com) also has a good reputation. Cheaper rollers may be OK, but some tend to deform over time. You could make your own from a bit of plastic tubing and some foam, too; just google and follow one of the video tutorials.

TRY THIS

Soothe your quads: rest your upper thighs on the foam roller and move slowly up and down the offending area. Stop when you hit a tender spot and hold the pressure there for 45 seconds, or until the muscle starts to let go.



RECOVER WITH CHOCOLATE

Repair muscle by slapping on the spread

Chocolate spread is now good for you. Honestly! We've just discovered new Prutella, which has less than a tenth of the sugar of that big hazelnut spread brand, and a fifth of the fat. It's good for you as a post-ride recovery food too, with 18g of muscle-building protein per 100g and 25.5g of gut-friendly fibre. Most importantly though, it still tastes like chocolate. £4.95, musclefood.com



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Enduro



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The CARAPAX by Alpina sports a simple and cool look. With a rear pulled far downward, distinctive vents, shield adjustable in height and a simple exterior design and striking colors it's got what it takes in Enduro biking: aggressiveness and sheer style.

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FIVE MUST-DO MTB ADVENTURES

Become the complete mountain biker by ticking off our essentials

1 RACE

Racing a mountain bike is a totally different experience to riding one — you could be competing on your local trails, on your regular bike and with friends, but adding a stopwatch changes everything. You'll push yourself harder and become more deeply involved than on any social ride. Catch the last round of the Scottish Enduro Series, Largs, Ayrshire, October 17-18 £50, sientries.co.uk. Or try an XC marathon at Oktoberfest, Ashton Court, October 10 £32, oktober-fest.co.uk.

2 RIDE

The feeling of riding a new trail for the first time can't be beaten, so get out there and sample something different. Fancy a bike park experience? Try the flowy berms and big jumps at Black Mountains Cycle Centre. Need a new trail centre? Try lesser-known ones like Cwm Rhaeadr in mid-Wales or Darren Fawr Mountain Bike Trails, in the Gawr Valley near Afan. Love natural riding? We've got hundreds of GPS routes to follow, go to po.st/trails and download one.

3 WATCH

There's a big culture around riding, from social events to festivals and full-length movies. We reckon the best experience off the bike comes from watching a World Cup live. You might have seen it online, but to actually be there when a pro flies past at 40mph, is another experience entirely — you can taste the dust and feel the ground move. The after-race parties are good too. The next race is in Lourdes, France, on April 9-10.



Try something new: get out and enter an enduro race

4 ENGAGE

Help mountain biking by offering your spare time — the sport will benefit and you'll feel great too. Join a trail building group like the Dean Trail Volunteers or the Glentress Trail Fairies, help out at the next EWS at Tweedlove, or promote your local trail advocacy group, such as Ride Sheffield. You can also help the Trails for Wales campaign to promote open access riding, see page 24.

5 BUILD

An off-the-peg bike is great, but a little personalisation will make your bike feel different — it might make it ride better too. Start small and change things like colour-coded rotors from Orangebikes.co.uk or a funky-covered saddle from Fabric.cc. Careful though, you might get tempted to go the whole hog and get a fully customised bike from Commençal, Trek or Rose.



BUILD A DIY CAR RACK

Fed up with a mucky interior? Loathe to put your bike on the roof? Build a rack for less than the cost of a wash and wax

With a deep dread of putting his precious Kona Process outside in the wind and rain (plus a dropper post that only worked if stored vertically), **mbr** picture man Jason Hardy set about building a rack for his Citroën Berlingo Multispace.

"I wanted to keep the bike upright in the car, and I didn't want to have to remove the rear wheel, or fanny round too much with the rear seats," Jason explained.

He sculpted a standard 1.22m x 2.44m sheet of MDF to fit the space and rest neatly on the boot floor. The bike then sits in a channel in the wood and the front wheel is secured into a fork mount, screwed to the MDF base.

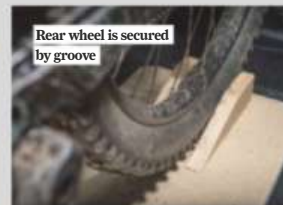
"The design is specific to my car, but with a bit of experimentation and bodging you can probably come up with your own tailored solution," said Jason.



Fork mount holds the front end fast



Front wheel is strapped to frame



Rear wheel is secured by groove



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SET UP YOUR SRAM BRAKES LIKE A PRO

Get the ultimate brake power and feel, with SRAM race mechanic Todd Anderson



1 NEW BRAKE PADS

Pop the bike in a workstand, remove the wheel and retaining bolt and replace the pads if you're close to the metal backing plate — put the pads into the new spring-clip they come with and insert. Replace the retaining bolt — careful not to over-tighten — and spread the pads and pistons back into the caliper with a pad spacer (it comes with the bleed kit).



2 LUBE THE PISTONS

With the wheel and rotor removed, pull the brake lever and let the pistons come all the way until the pads make contact. Then use the spacer to open them out. Repeat the process three times and the pistons will lubricate themselves and work smoothly.



3 CURE THE RUB

Spin the wheel and listen and look for any brake rub. Got some? Loosen mounting bolts a quarter-turn until the caliper can move freely, spin the wheel again and squeeze the lever — the rotor will position the caliper nicely and you can tighten the bolts again. Sometimes that doesn't work, though, so look down at the pad from above and figure out by eye if it's the front or rear that's touching. Loosen the bolts, move the caliper so it's central and carefully nip up the bolts.



4 CHECK THE ROTOR

Spin the wheel and check for a bent rotor; look at one spot, such as the mounting bracket and rotor, for movement. Left untreated, it can push the piston back in as it spins and give the brake an inconsistent feel. Replace the rotor (truing a rotor is tricky), bed it in, but you can keep the old pads.



Watch a video of Todd doing it properly at po.st/sram

5 BLEED TIME

No need to tilt the bike, or lever, to odd angles; just put the bike in a workstand and hook up your syringes as per the SRAM instructions. But contrary to those instructions, don't have the pad contact adjustment wound-in, fully closed — leave it about middle for fine-tuning after the bleed is done.



6 MATCH THE LEVERS

With a ruler, measure the distance from the levers to the bar, and use the reach-adjuster until the gap is equal. Now ensure the pads are making contact in exactly the same position too, using the pad contact-adjuster.



ROLL SOFTLY ON THE EARTH

Forget pumping up your tyres to a million psi, it makes sod-all difference to your speed

Pumping up your tyres harder will make you roll faster over the trail, right? Dead wrong. The most significant factor in rolling resistance — by a country mile — is the surface on which you're riding, so says the latest research. You can release a bit of air, lock out the suspension, even cut off your own head to reduce weight, it won't make much difference; no matter whether you're spinning 26 or 29 inches of rubber, you can be sure that it's the ground beneath your wheels that plays the most important role in rolling resistance and, thus, your speed.

How do we know this?

A South African team has done the tests and come up with the numbers. They used both hardtails and full-suspension 26ers and 29ers, riders of three different weights (70, 80 and 90kg) and three different tyre pressures (26, 36 and 72psi). Then they did the most boring thing you can do on a bike: a roll-down test. It is exactly what it sounds like it is — rolling down an incline until you slow to a stop or fall asleep, and on a variety of surfaces. Which gives a pretty good indication of rolling resistance.

What did they find?

Tyre pressure makes minimal difference to your momentum. As far as rolling resistance goes, yes, a 26er doesn't do quite as well as a 29er, but full-sus doesn't have the edge over a hardtail.

What should I do with my pressures, then?

Forget about pumping up your tyres hard for long rides. Instead, drop your pressures to get more traction — useful for cornering. It's not going to make a notable difference to the energy you lose through rolling resistance.

60-MINUTE SINGLETRACK

Get started mountain biking with three of the best blue trails

MINORTAUR AT COED Y BRENIN, NORTH WALES

10km or 1hour

Made from bite-sized loops that get longer and progressively more challenging, the MinorTaur entices and challenges new riders in equal measure.



VERDERERS AT FOREST OF DEAN, GLOS

11km or 1hour

The Verderers trail has always been a smooth and flowy favourite of ours, and now it's getting an alternative final descent to keep things fresh.



BLUE SCAR AT AFAN, SOUTH WALES

7km or 1hour

One of Afan's newest trails, Blue Scar features wooden boardwalk and smooth flow all the way. It's roller-coaster fast; keep a check on your speed.





A close-up, high-angle shot of a bicycle's front end. The frame is silver with the word 'COOKER.' partially visible. The tire is black with a prominent tread pattern and the text '2.8 27.5' on the sidewall. The background is white.

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First rides

SWINGING A LEG OVER WHAT'S HOT THIS MONTH

NORCO RANGE CARBON 7.1

£4,080 (reduced from £4,800) / 650b / evanescycles.com

NEED TO KNOW

- Enduro bike with 160mm travel and 650b wheels
- Carbon frame is 20 per cent lighter than aluminium version
- 'Gravity Tune' geometry sees effective chainstay length grow with each frame size
- Cane Creek DB Air shock has independent compression, rebound circuits and 'Climb Switch'

How does the carbon version of Norco's high-end enduro bike compare to its aluminium counterpart?

British Columbia is home to some of the world's best all-mountain riding, so Norco ought to know how to make a sorted enduro bike. Its 160mm-travel Range has been available in aluminium for a couple of years, but the new carbon version is the Canadian brand's go-to, high-end race machine.

To test the Range Carbon 7.1 in the terrain it was designed for, I headed to Alpe d'Huez, home of the Megavalanche as well as plenty of other incredible trails. Before arriving, I took a quick spin on a cheaper Range, which left me feeling a little underwhelmed, but rolling out of the cable car into a fast, braking bump-riddled bike park track, I was in for a big surprise on the deluxe 7.1 version.

Within minutes the ride quality and handling had blown away any of the preconceptions floating around in my head. The geometry isn't particularly aggressive or slack, nor is the frame the stiffest out there, but the bike felt alive and perfectly balanced — the lighter, stiffer wheels and better suspension making for handling that's worlds apart from the cheaper Norco Range 7.4.

Cane Creek's Double Barrel shock is likely a big factor in the Norco's playful character — it can be tuned perfectly to your taste, from floaty and easy to bottom, to tighter and more supportive, depending on how much air pressure and damping is dialled in. Despite being a keen tweeker, I didn't even open the air sleeve to check



The carbon Range comes with SRAM's XX1 groupset



Norco's new Range is nimble, nippy and impressively smooth



RockShox's Dual Position Pike is a little too keen to compress



Tune Cane Creek's Barrel shock to suit your taste

SPECIFICATION

Frame Norco Range Carbon, 160mm travel
Shock Cane Creek DB Air w/Climb Switch
Fork RockShox Pike RCT3 Dual Position Air, 160/130mm travel
Wheels DT Swiss 35 hubs, Stan's Flow EX rims, Maxxis High Roller II 3C 27.5x2.3in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM XX1
Brakes SRAM Guide RSC, 180mm rotors
Components RockShox Reverb Stealth, WTB Volt saddle, Race Face SixC 800mm bar, Race Face Atlas 50mm stem
Sizes M, L
Weight 13.3kg (29lb)

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L
Rider height 5ft 9in
Head angle 66.1°
Seat angle 72.4°
BB height 342mm
Chainstay 430mm
Front centre 752mm
Wheelbase 1,182mm
Down tube 710mm
Top tube 626mm
Reach 435mm



how many progression-increasing spacers were fitted, as the ramp-up in the shock felt perfect for my 82kg. Small-bump sensitivity and traction was as good as any other 160mm bike I've tried, and despite such supple suspension, the Range never exhibited too much wallow. In fact, stamp on the cranks, or slam the bike in and out of berms, and the Range rewards you with significant acceleration and pump. It's light over the rough stuff and fast and

I rode harder and faster in the Alps than I have for years

responsive when making sudden direction changes too.

If I'm being really picky, a couple of the parts adorning the Range are not to my taste. The Dual Position RockShox Pike is too divey, even if the active mid-stroke is a good match for the bottomless feel of the rear end. And while SRAM's carbon XX1 cranks are lightweight and a big tick for most, when using big, wide flat pedals they flex and take away some of the bike's solidity. I'd also like to see a bigger 2.4in High Roller II on the front to maximise control at the high speeds the Range goads you into hitting.

You might have guessed by now that I can't put this bike down. I had to tighten the main pivot after the first ride, but since then durability has been good. Probably the best compliment I can give the Range is that I felt so comfortable and safe on it, I rode

harder and faster in the Alps this summer than I have for years. I like it so much, I'm anticipating a bout of severe depression when I finally have to box it up and send it back to Evans.

Mick Kirkman

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION

✓ HIGHS

A well balanced ride that comes with extremely comfortable, smooth suspension that doesn't sacrifice any potential for pure speed.

✗ LOWS

A RockShox Pike Solo Air fork would be better than the Dual Position option and you need to keep an eye on the pivot hardware, as it's prone to coming loose.

KONA HEI HEI DL TRAIL

£2,799 / 29in / konaworld.com

The latest short-travel 29er from Kona runs rings around its predecessor

NEED TO KNOW

- Short-travel 29er built for race and trail
- Trail version gets 120mm-travel fork
- No dropout pivot to save weight and reduce complication

Aside from a couple of brief car park test rides, Kona's Hei Hei was the first 29er I spent any real time on. The year was 2012 and the location was Tucson, Arizona, at the El Pueblo 24-hour race. Five 16-mile laps were ample time to get acquainted with this full-suspension race bike and I recall, through a haze of fatigue and exhaustion, a bike that helped flatten the undulating course, turned every drop of my precious energy into forward momentum and rarely came unstuck on the dusty, desert singletrack. But it was hardly an inspiring ride. A little heavy, with conservative geometry, it never really came alive on the surprisingly fun, flowing course.

What a difference a few years make. Injected with the same DNA that has made Kona's Process range such a success, the new Hei Hei is a race bike that made me grin, not grimace. Instead of the usual steep, twitchy geometry and arse-up, head-down riding position, the Hei Hei put me in a commanding stance for shredding singletrack. There's a trail-friendly 68° head angle with the 120mm fork complemented by a 740mm bar and 60mm stem on the size large I rode. And like its Process brethren, the standover clearance is generous, so I could really sling it into turns and attack technical sections without getting tangled up in the frame.

Even the suspension felt lively and compliant, rather than inert and tuned purely for efficiency. And while the new rear end uses trendy flexible stays, instead of a dropout pivot (to save unsprung weight and reduce complexity), I comfortably ran the shock towards the open end of its rebound range without noticing any extra kick.

The lightweight Hei Hei proved lively and compliant



With such a rewarding ride, the new Hei Hei actually begins to tread on the toes of Kona's other short-travel 29er, the Process 111. The geometry, for one thing, is almost identical, with the Hei Hei just a hair shorter. Ultimately, the defining difference for me is that the Hei Hei trades the solidity of the Process for a lighter chassis and snappier acceleration. Neither, though, will leave you feeling short-changed on your favourite section of singletrack.

Danny Milner

1ST IMPRESSION

HIGHS

A hoot to ride, much lighter with far better handling than its predecessor.

LOWS

Time will tell how the flexible stays will hold up, although the Hei Hei does come with a lifetime warranty.

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061 butted aluminium, 100mm travel

Shock Fox Float Performance

Fork Fox 34 Float Performance FIT, 120mm travel

Wheels Novatech hubs, Stan's ZTR Rapid 25 rims, Maxxis Ardent Exo TR/Ikon Exo TR 29x2.25/2.2in tyres

Drivetrain Race Face Aeffect crank, Shimano XT shifter and r-mech

Brakes Shimano XT, 180/160mm

Components Kona

Weight 28.2kg (27.33lb)

Sizes S, M, L, XL

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L

Rider height 5ft 10in

Head angle 68°

Seat angle 74°

BB height 338mm

Chainstay 430mm

Front centre 745mm

Wheelbase 1,158mm

Down tube 728mm

Top tube 618mm

Reach 444mm



WATCH THE VIDEO

See the Kona in action with Danny — just go to po.st/HeiHei



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SCOTT SCALE 710 PLUS

£1,899 / 27.5in Plus / scott-sports.com

Scott's new Plus-size model tears up the trails

NEED TO KNOW

- New 27.5in Plus version of the Scale hardtail
- 2.8in tyres on 40mm rims increase traction
- Boost width fork and rear dropouts provide the necessary tyre clearance
- Fox 32 Float fork sports 120mm travel
- Available in four frame sizes

I've always had something of a soft spot for the Scott Scale hardtail, its slack steering geometry and sublime handling seamlessly bridging the divide between World Cup XC racing and trail riding. So when the opportunity to ride the new 27.5in Plus version presented itself, at the Scott launch in Italy, I jumped straight in.

Scott hasn't simply inflated the tyre and rim dimensions, however, it's also shifted the focus of the new Scale Plus more towards trail riding. You can still get the classic 29in and regular 27.5in versions, but in addition there are two Plus size models with bespoke alloy frames, shorter stems and 120mm-travel forks promising levels of grip and control previously unseen on a hardtail.

And the top-end Scale 710 Plus certainly delivered on that promise. On the fast-flowing trails of Massa Vecchia, I simply couldn't believe how easy it was to maintain rear tyre grip when hammering uphill. So, no inadvertent wheel spins that would have knees smashing into stems, and not once did I feel the need to fine-tune my body position just to maintain traction. Climbing never felt so easy! Cornering and braking traction were equally impressive too, especially given the 'fast rolling' PaceStar compound Schwalbe tyres that come fitted as standard.

After spending a full day in the saddle of the Scale 710 Plus, I walked away convinced that the extra contact with the ground that the bulbous 2.8in tyres provide, will be welcome to all fair-weather hardtail riders. It wasn't all rosy, however. To stop the weight of the wheels from creeping up and negatively impacting on acceleration, the 2.8in Schwalbe tyres have a relatively thin casing. If you've ever ridden lightweight Schwalbe tyres you'll no doubt be aware that pinch flats can be an issue. Well, Plus size tyres are no different. In the end I had to up the pressures to prevent flats, which in turn robbed me of the additional cushioning I was



Scale's pace: stubby stem and fat hoops boost control at speed

anticipating with so much rubber between me and the trail. Maybe my expectations were simply too high; it is a hardtail after all. But, I genuinely thought that the 2.8in tyres would offer more of a magic-carpet ride. Yes, there was certainly more grip than with regular size tyres, but I really didn't notice any increase in comfort. With heavier casing tyres that could be run softer with reduced risk of flattening, 27.5in Plus could be a complete game changer for hardtails. Time will tell!

Alan Muldoon

SPECIFICATION

Frame Scale Plus aluminium
Fork Fox 32 Float Performance, 120mm travel
Wheels Syncros CL811 Boost hubs, Syncros X40 rims, Schwalbe Rocket Ron 27.5x2.8in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM GX1 chainset, r-mech and shifter
Brakes Shimano Deore 180/160mm
Components Syncros
Sizes S, M, L, XL
Weight 11.8kg (26.0lb)
Contact scott-sports.com

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L
Rider height 5ft 11in
Head angle 67.6°
Seat angle 72.8°
BB height 313mm
Chainstay 439mm
Front centre 720mm
Wheelbase 1,159mm
Top tube 627mm
Reach 435mm

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION

✓ HIGHS

Short stems, rangy cockpits and trail-focused geometry put the Scale 710 Plus on point. Climbing traction is simply off the scale (sorry!).

✗ LOWS

Punctures spoil the fun and at this price you really should get a dropper post.



SPECIFICATION

Frame TCC full carbon frame
Fork Fox 32 Float CTD w/remote lockout, 100mm travel
Wheels DT Swiss X1700 Spline, Continental Race King 29x2.2in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM X01
Brakes SRAM Guide R, 180/160mm
Components BMC bar and stem, BMC Compliance carbon 27.2 seatpost, Fizik Tundra 2 saddle
Weight 10.49kg (23.1lb)
Sizes XS, S, M, L, XL

GEOMETRY

Size ridden M
Rider height 5ft 8in
Head angle 69.8°
Seat angle 73.5°
BB height 304mm
Chainstay 429mm
Front centre 685mm
Wheelbase 1,107mm
Down tube 704mm
Top tube 610mm
Reach 426mm

BMC TEAMELITE TE02 X01

£2,250 (reduced from £3,000) / 29in / evanscycles.com

Latest 'Big Wheel Concept' BMC gets thoroughly beach-tested

NEED TO KNOW

- Second-from-top XC race bike in the Teamelite range
- Carbon frame with BMC's Big Wheel Concept 29er geometry
- Fox 32 Float fork with 100mm travel and remote CTD lever
- SRAM X01 groupset with 30t chaining
- Five frame sizes

In preparation for this year's Howies Battle on the Beach, I found myself struggling with a rather fortunate dilemma: whether to race a cyclo-cross bike — more familiar territory for me, lighter and potentially faster — or to go for a mountain bike that could offer extra grip in the deeper sand and more fun on the trails that snaked through the dunes.

As I wasn't in contention for a podium finish, when the opportunity to ride BMC's Teamelite TE02 X01 cross-country machine came up, I jumped at it, as it seemingly offered the perfect compromise between traction and weight.

From the outset, it was clear that what might have been considered compromises didn't actually exist. The TE02 climbs like no other mtb I've ridden. It's impressively light, at 10.49kg, and power transfer is remarkable through the stiff carbon frame with its ultra-wide PF92 BB shell. To achieve some compliance at the rear, BMC uses similar technology across its XC mtbs and endurance road bikes. As such, the lay-up of the carbon seatstays is finely-tuned to filter out trail chatter and, combined with the slender, 27.2mm seatpost, there's a tangible improvement in comfort.

There is plenty of straight-line speed on offer too, and it was easy to make my



Compliant rear end borrows road bike technology

little bursts of acceleration count in the mass dash across 5km of pan-flat beach. Built around BMC's 'Big Wheel Concept' geometry, the TE02 frame is optimised for 29-inch wheels. That translates to a (claimed) low bottom bracket, very short chainstays, a long top tube and slacker steering geometry. With the stock 70mm stem, the size M bike had a pretty stretched riding position, one that may feel a touch long unless you're a diehard racer. Still, it felt perfect for the terrain, and I had no

issues adjusting to it from my road bike. Handling was great — sure rather than sharp — and I didn't get that 'runaway horse' feeling that I've experienced before with 29ers.

I ran the Fox 32 Float fork at the maximum recommended pressure for my weight, which was pretty much spot-on for the terrain, dealing with the worst of the roots and bumps without being too soft hammering across the beach. Which was handy, as my only real complaint with the BMC, as an out-and-out race bike, was that it doesn't offer a full lockout when using Climb mode. Other than that, it's an impressively fast package.

Matt Levett

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION



HIGHS

The lightweight carbon frame and Gucci build kit offer impressive climbing speed. Great frame compliance too for a hardtail.



LOWS

Too much fork movement in Climb mode. Rear brake hose rubs on the fork crown.



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[FEATURES]

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REAL WORLD RIDING

Dan Trent just wants to ride — but life keeps getting in the way



Fashion disasters

A clearout of old kit shows Dan he wasn't as cool as he thought he was

The older I get, the faster I went' is an old motorsport adage that's applicable to biking too. Back in the day, the trails were gnarlier, you would clear six-foot drops to flat with little more than a Flexstem to cushion the landing, you rode 20 miles in the rain to the trailhead, rather than put your bike on the roof of an Audi, and you were fitter, braver and — crucially — cooler.

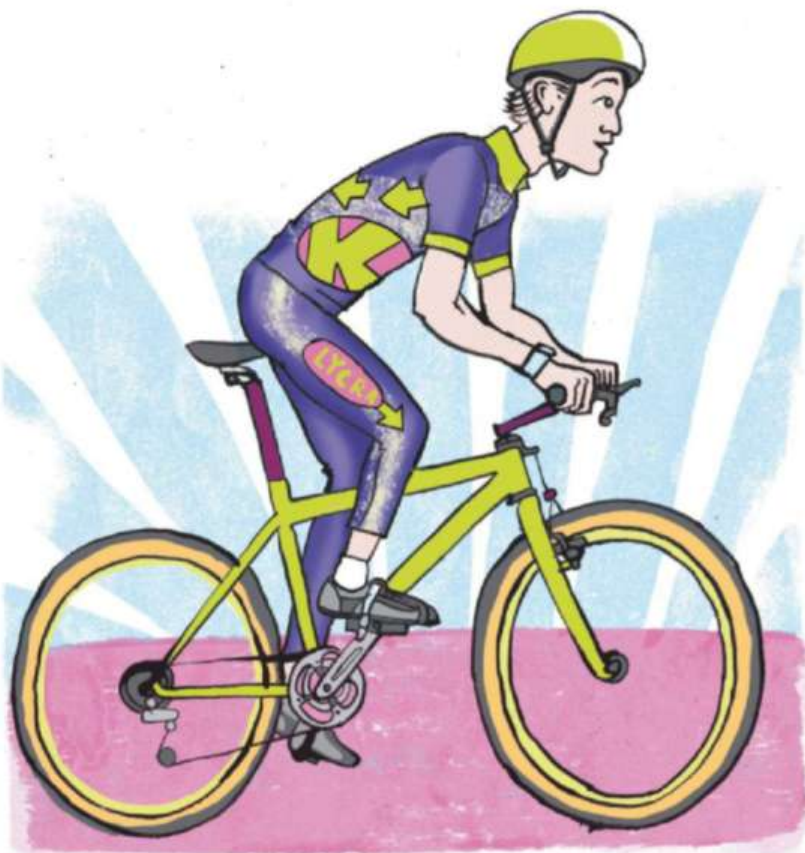
You might be right. On all but the last one. Fashion is a cruel mistress, and I often think the parents of anyone born in the Seventies get a particularly raw deal. Think back to the wedding photos and early holiday snaps and reflect on some of the flares, collars and haircuts being rocked by our parents back in the day. Good comedy value for us. A permanent cringe for them.

Trouble is, I've got a nasty feeling we'll be in for an equivalent shock when Junior T's generation catch sight of the bikes and kit we were using.

My recent house move has meant a rationalisation of both clothing and bike components, not to mention a sorting out of old photos. And I've been doing some cringing of my own. It's been a long time since I rode a mountain bike in full Lycra but, unfortunately, there is documentary proof that I did. And while I thought I was 'The Man' on my Kona Lava Dome with team shirt, it turns out a gangly 16-year-old in leggings isn't quite the look.

After years of nagging, the house move finally prompted me to have a clearout of cycling kit. And I was shocked at what I'd kept. Remember those burgundy/black Endura Star Trek tops every self-respecting trail rider wore in the 90s? Turns out I still had mine. Didn't smell too good though. And the Roach shorts we all rushed out and bought after seeing those early vids of Wade Simmons and the like? Yup, still got them too, complete with rips from hard landings off the Surrey 'twiglet shore' we built in homage to the mighty constructions over in BC.

And in the cellar it was little better. In amongst so many bike components



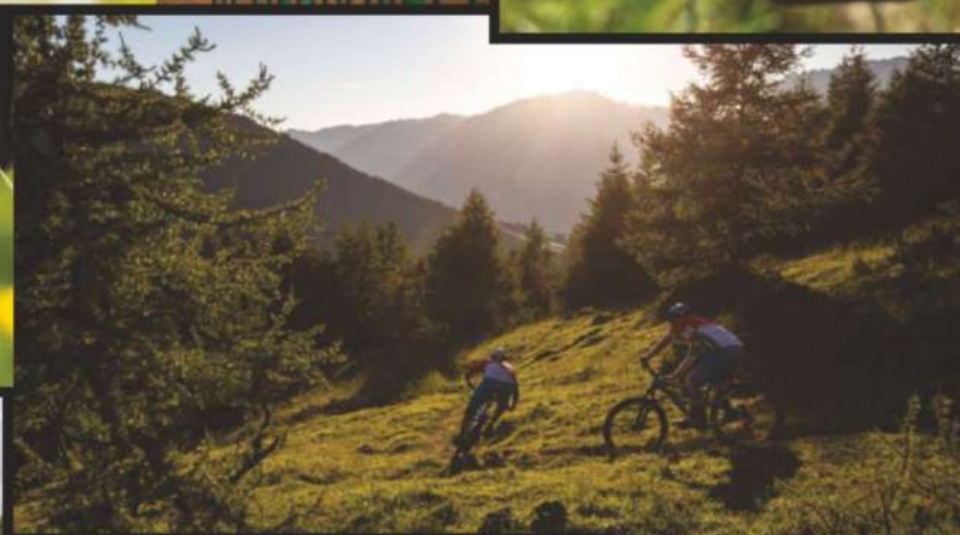
It's been a long time since I rode in full Lycra...but it did happen

— carefully accumulated in endless mail order deliveries, swapped with friends or otherwise acquired — I found some lovely Race Face Turbine cranks. I remember thinking they were the ultimate in bike bling when I had them, and after a hard life, they were carefully put away for future use. As if I would ever run a bike with a square-taper bottom bracket again. Endless shifters for now redundant seven, eight or nine-speed set-ups, eclectic chain devices never installed, a heap of handlebars, none of which would fit any bike I now own. And what the hell are these 'inner tube' things?

Obviously, NOW, I am right on the cutting edge of fashion. My shorts are the right length. My bars are so wide my chin is on the stem when I hold the grips,

my frame is low-slung and possessed of the wheelbase a top fuel dragster would be proud of, and my wheels are of this week's preferred diameter. I've even dumped the Camelbak and followed the trend for riding packless and with a bottle and cage — fashion is nothing if not cyclical after all.

And, of course, vanity requires that I have photographic evidence of my coolness, shared socially for all to see. The only problem being that, unlike those shots of me in my Lycra, I won't be able to hide them in the furthest corner of the loft and pretend they don't exist. Nope. They're all online for Junior T and his sister to stumble across years hence and guffaw over. The fashion crimes of our parents may have been heinous. But at least they can bury the evidence.



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COMPONENTS OF ADVENTURE

BORN AGAIN RIDER

After years off the bike, veteran mtb snapper Geoff Waugh has caught the bug again



Popping and locking

Leave no trace, take only memories

Oh no. Another internet furore kicked-off recently and I sat back and watched it all unfold in front of me — an armchair-bound voyeur revelling in the inflammatory comments to-ing and fro-ing before my very eyes. What was it all about? A video of a mountain biker, shall we say, over-egging it for the camera. In his desire to look as siiiick as possible, he used every possible bank and lip on the trail to change direction, sending huge roosts of dirt in his wake and practically destroying the ground under his wheels. To be honest, I thought he looked awkward and stiff, but I'm certain the action appealed to some.

Accustomed, as we are, to seeing out-of-our-league talent parading across our screens, smashing berms and leaving massive dust clouds from the lips of enormous jumps, it appears there is a tipping point where the mountain biker's instinct to protect and preserve trails takes over. And, in this instance, it happened with a vengeance. It got me thinking about the way I ride, albeit in a mere mortal style.

The expression "skids are for kids" is one I have shouted plenty of times at mates when they have locked the back wheel and slid broadside around a turn. But I am as guilty as they are. And so are you. You know it. Much as we are told locking the back wheel is bad — it is — getting your opposite lock on just feels so good. And knowing you can lock your wheels is a comfort, right? Rather a lock-up than that heart-in-mouth, lever-to-the-grip moment.

Way back in the mists of ATB time, I was sent an anti-lock rim brake to test. It was made in Italy, very expensive and absolute pants. I didn't want to feel a pulse through the lever; I wanted to know that I could make the pads bite so hard that the wheel would lock. Only then would I have the necessary feel to be able to release the pressure the instant before that happened. It is a delicate dance between your brakes, tyres and the voice inside your head. And it's one of riding's great delights.

You could say that braking is admitting defeat. Certainly, none of us likes a squealing disc betraying our lack of commitment, but good braking is definitely a victory. Cleaning a tricky section without resorting to braking is often the highlight of a ride. Our minds have connected with our fingers in such a positive way that they have remained



*Braking is ...
admitting defeat*

idle on the levers. Our eyes have steered us through the lines where momentum dictated our progress and confidence kept us off the brakes.

Then there are the times when we hesitate, touch the brakes with slightly too much muscle and our wheels lose their will to go in a straight line, and we are cartwheeling down the trail. The line is so fine, and the variables of terrain are so big, that we will never be the ruler of every situation. Take wet roots for example; it is a lottery of grip and braking traction.

As you read this, we are heading towards the season of mud — nature's very own brake. Need to slow down? Just soft pedal, or stop pedalling altogether, and the soft stuff will trim your speed better than any disc. Human

input only becomes necessary on steeper ground.

But what about that video? Personally, I think the producers made an error of judgement. But when the most exciting imagery often contains the biggest roost, how can we blame them? For some time I pondered how exciting a video might be without the obligatory explosions of dirt and loam. Then I saw the teaser for Anthill's latest film, *UnReal*. The highpoint was Brandon Semenuk's sublime ride, through pristine meadows, on trails that looked like they have been pressed with an iron. Brandon's riding is so smooth he hardly raises a grain of dirt as he glides over the ground. No thrash metal; the segment ambles along to a mellow track from Buffalo Springfield. Sometimes less is a whole lot more.



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Lakeland Monster Miles

ADVENTURE CROSS SPORTIVE

Lakeland Monster Miles is a picturesque, challenging route showcasing the full range of what the lakes has to offer, with a full loop of the Skiddaw Massif

Words: John Walsh Photo: Roo Fowler

Lakeland riding throws some unique challenges at riders and it's not just the rocks and mud that make it interesting. Now in its third year, Monster Miles is the original Adventure Cross event. Steep gradients and relentless climbing, plus a bit of typical Lakeland weather, make it a tough but satisfying day out.

The route starts from Fitz Park in Keswick. On a tree-lined disused railway the first off-road sector is a great warm-up, with a river below and occasional glimpses of distant hills a taste of the spectacular views to come. If you are lucky, bursts of golden light will be filtering through the trees as the valley starts to take on the colours of autumn. Off the old railway you are onto quiet lanes with barely any traffic as you climb up into the hills.

Both the Massif and Mini-Massif follow the same route before splitting shortly after Cockermouth with the Mini missing out a section around Loweswater and the final and highest climb of the day in Whinlatter Forest. The climb through Whinlatter is a long slog up the forest roads, and while your lungs will be burning it is soon forgotten once you start dropping down the trails, losing your hard won height on a glorious descent.

Technical challenge

Of all the Adventure Cross events this is the most technical. A highlight is the Miner's Track a wild, barren

climb on an exposed part of the course. Rocky, steep and long, you may also have to contend with cross winds and will undoubtedly need to pick your lines wisely to get to the top. The fast grassy descent is an exhilarating test of bravery as you pick your line through boggy ground, willing yourself to stay off the brakes.

There is a real mix of terrain to test both your fitness and your technique. The muddy 'Bog Trotters' sector requires smooth, strong pedal strokes, while the rocky descents will test your nerve and line choice. MTB gearing will certainly help on some of the steeper hills, and a tip to anyone riding a cross bike would be to fit a mountain bike cassette and a 34-tooth inner ring for those leg-burning ascents.

Lakeland Monster Miles has rapidly earned 'must-do' ride status and, as the toughest of the lot, is a fitting way to round off the Adventure Cross season. It's not an event to take lightly if you plan on tackling the full 100km, but with preparation and determination it's a fantastic day out. It has all the components that make Adventure Cross a great experience: spectacular views, wilderness, challenging climbs and whoop-inducing descents.

WHY RIDE IT?

The original and the best. It is toughest both physically and technically of all the events, offering a full take of the best of Lakeland riding and is a great way to end the Adventure Cross year.



THE DETAILS

DATE

Sunday 4th October 2015

WHERE IS IT

Fitz Park, Keswick
Cumbria

Keswick is the popular outdoor capital of the northern district.

Postcode: CA12 4HS

HOW TO ENTER

Visit www.bookmyride.co.uk
Entry may be available on the day if the event hasn't sold out in advance

WHERE TO STAY

The Royal Oak Is right in the heart of town and offers quality pub food for a post-ride meal.

www.royaloakkeswick.co.uk

Harvington House. Keen cyclist and ex-tour guide from around the globe, host Graham will ensure a hearty breakfast at his B&B and some insider tips on the local trails. www.harvington-house.co.uk

LOCAL BIKE SHOP

The route passes no fewer than three bike shops: **Keswick Bikes, Kewsick** www.keswickbikes.co.uk,

4 Play Cycles, Cockermouth www.4playcycles.co.uk and **Cycleswise, Whinlatter** www.cyclewise.co.uk.

CW difficulty rating: Technical terrain difficulty: 5/5 Wilderness Riding 4/5

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MASSIF STATS

TOTAL DISTANCE- 100 KM/ 62 MILES

57% (57 KM) OFF ROAD

43% (43 KM) ON TARMAC

TOTAL ASCENT- 2465 M



MINI MASSIF STATS

TOTAL DISTANCE- 71 M/ 44 MILES

53% (37 KM) OFF ROAD

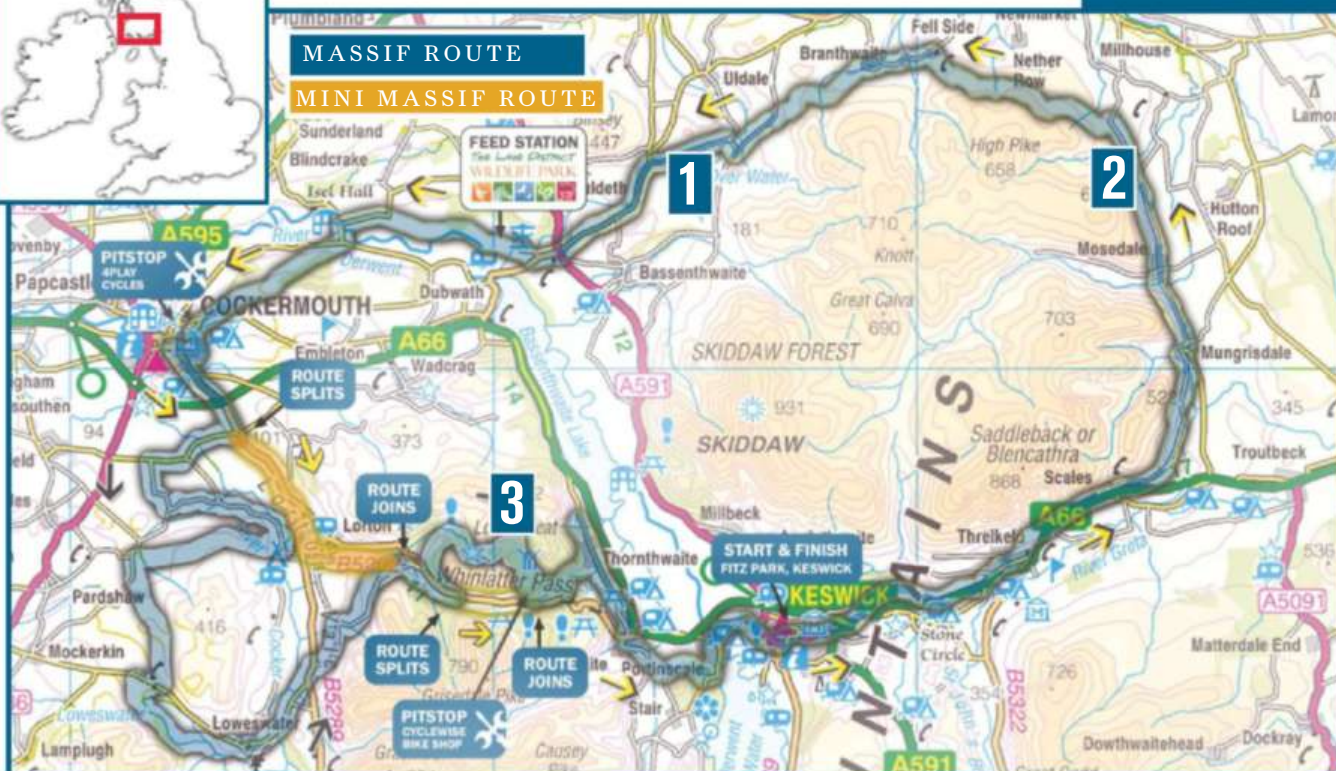
47% (34KM) ON TARMAC

TOTAL ASCENT- 1773 M



MASSIF ROUTE

MINI MASSIF ROUTE



CHALLENGES

1 Circling the Massif

The long route neatly circumnavigates the whole Skiddaw Massif, with plenty of steep ups and downs, but also striking views of the mountain itself.

2 Miner's Track

Rocky, exposed and often windy, this is a grippy, technical climb that requires you to pick your line wisely and apply your power smoothly. Loose rocks make it extra tricky as they roll and bounce under you wheels.

3 Final Climb

The long climb to the highest point of the route in Whinlatter Forest is a real leg-killer. Starting off on a narrow singletrack before joining the winding forest road, it takes some concentration to survive this final hurdle.

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YOUR LETTERS

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★ STAR LETTER ★

THE LAST RUN

My 13-year-old son and I ventured to Wintringham Woods for a father-son bonding session and a few laughs on the mountain bikes.

All went brilliantly well until the last run of the day. "Come on Euan. Last run then back to the car, load up and home. Let's give it some welly..." These were very nearly my last words.

The next thing I remember is the most excruciating pain I have ever known. Euan rushes up to me and tells me not to move, to slow my breathing down and that I would be OK. Total role reversal.

Incredible. He started to see my eyes roll back and my breathing become chesty and very erratic. He said I was clammy and very pale. He said: "Daddy I'm going to get help now. Just stay there and don't move. You will be fine!"

I was in and out of consciousness but I remember him holding my hand and telling me everything will be OK. Within a few minutes there were six or seven bikers around me. Euan didn't leave my side.

I have no idea of how long it was before the helicopter arrived, but when it did, Euan was still there holding my hand and telling me

Traumatic times can change your perspective on life



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how much he loved me. I asked him a week or so after the crash what was going through his mind as they closed the door. The response from my 13-year-old son was "I didn't think I was going to see you alive again..."

The power of that will always resonate with me.

As I write this from my hospital bed nearly six weeks later, his strength, support and love still brings tears to my eyes.

He has since been awarded a certificate from his scouts troop for extreme bravery and I'm in contact with the CEO of Lincs and Notts Air Ambulance who want

to do something for him when I'm either fully mobile or at least wheelchair bound.

What was meant to be a day of fun with my son on the bikes has ended up as a life-changing experience. I knocked on the big man's doors that Saturday but no one could be bothered answering!

Simon Bryston

Ed - Blimey, that's some amazing level-headedness from your son, in what must have been an intensely traumatic experience. Good luck with the recovery and, for everyone else, that's why we never call last run of the day.

MINORITY REPORT

My son, Luke, has been coming up through the 4X ranks for the last couple of years, competing in the junior series and becoming the national champ. He then went straight into pro elite, a year early. This year he finished third in the GB series and won silver at the World Championships. He did all of this without a main sponsor.

Luke wasn't academic and was written off at school despite his brilliant biking talent. He went to BASE (Borders Academy of Sporting Excellence) in Galashiels/Innerleithen and has continued to build on his natural skills and ability. He is hoping to compete in Enduro next year, a discipline I'm sure he will also excel in — the only thing that stopped him this year was money. It's a great story for a young but very

talented lad and will be an inspiration for other youngsters, I'm sure.

4X is a great spectator sport and great to compete in; it would be nice to see it given some credit and magazine space.

Gill Cryer

OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS

Well it's been a year-and-a-half since my dad brought home his brand new Orange Five 29 with the pro spec and the Troy Lee A1 helmet. Oh how I mocked him as he'd decided to try following in my footsteps.

Eighteen months later and I couldn't have been more wrong. He has amazed me! When he first said he wanted to try the South Downs Way, I scoffed at the idea of a man who could barely make it around the red route of Bedgebury, conquering the South Downs. 🇬🇧



Well, even though he is yet to achieve this goal, the amount of miles he has put in on the bike has been astounding! He tracks all of his rides on GPS and has conquered some very large challenges for himself.

I hope that everyone understands how far my 53-year-old dad has come! He is a huge inspiration for me!

Gregory Melville

TRAIL FAIL

The group of mountain bikers I ride with had been talking about going to Hamsterley Forest for some time. Based on this, and the **mb**r review, we went along.

What we found was very disappointing. The red trail was basically fire road for the majority of the route and black route, only seven miles long, is punctuated with yet more fire road.

I am not here to question your ability to review a trail centre, nor do I want Hamsterley to struggle, in fact I hope trail centres such as this thrive and help to grow the sport. However, it's telling that on a bank holiday, the car park isn't full.

The red trail is nothing more than a blue trail with two sections of red-level riding and the black route is basically a red route only seven miles long. The signposts were almost nonexistent and the trails were poorly marked.

I can't see us going back, but so much more could be done with the space available. Please can you take a look at your review as this is very misleading — riders actually read your magazine and take note of new venues to ride. As things stand I cannot recommend Hamsterley to anyone.

John Patterson

Ed — Sorry you didn't have a good experience at Hamsterley. As we pointed out in the article, it has never been blessed with the kind of funding enjoyed by other trail centres in Wales and Scotland, and instead relies on the hard work of volunteers for much of its trail network.

TEENAGE KICKS

At the age of 14 I thought that it was time to get a better bike. I love trail riding and doing massive drop-offs. I have my Dad's old bike until Christmas but then I would like to get a better bike. I'm looking to spend around £2,000 on a full-suspension bike — I have been on a hardtail for my whole life and would like to try something new. I have a good connection with shops that do Trek and Specialized so would like to have those makes over the others but any bike would be great!

Please could you recommend a bike that I would enjoy riding at Christmas?

Ben Delafield

Ed — Both Trek and Specialized make great bikes at around £2k — check out our reviews at po.st/2kMTB — but depending on your height and weight, Trek makes a super-cool Fuel EX Jr with 26in wheels for £1,400.

CHILD'S PLAY

My six-year-old son has an Isla Bikes Beinn 20 small, which he loves riding and is capable of covering up to about nine miles on a good day with us.

My problem is trying to find good places to take him off-road without terrifying him, but wanting to develop his skills. He has ridden the family loop at Alice Holt a few times but this only features fire roads (with cars in places!) and the green route at Swinley is only a mile long! The Blue route would be too challenging for him and he would only get in the way of other riders.

We live in Surrey near junction 10 of the M25; do you have any suggestions?

Mark

Ed — Check out the Summer Lightning extension from the top of Leith Hill to Coldharbour — there are a few tricky sections, but most of it should be fine for your son.

QUICK LINES

MARRIED WITH SKIDS

I got married last week. The day before the wedding, my wife-to-be told me she had an early wedding present for me, but I'd need my bike to go and find it, via a trail treasure hunt.

She gave me a card with the first clue and off I went on my old Camber. After several clues (and tasty treats), the trail eventually got to the pub we regularly cycle to for a mid-ride pint. Waiting for me there were loads of our friends and family, and a 2016 Specialized Stumpjumper Elite 29 with a huge bow on it!

Needless to say, I have definitely married the right girl! I am now looking forward to a long and happy biking life — the missus has recently got into the sport herself.

Tom Rhodes

OLD BLOKES WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER

In association with Broken Riders, brokenriders.com



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WHO Laurence Newland **WHERE** Antur Stiniog **WHEN** July 2015 **HOW** First proper attempt on full downhill rig, hired from Antur Stiniog. Five runs into the day, foot slipped off pedal, pedal decided to chew up shin.



WHO Steve Hughes **WHERE** The Judgement at Kirroghtree **WHEN** July 2015 **HOW** Small drop-off went totally wrong, went over the bars and discovered rocks are stronger than kneecaps!



WHO Joe Humpleby **WHERE** Haldon Forest **WHEN** August 2015 **HOW** Bars to the ribcage and some bruising to show his mates at school. The little trooper did the blue trail the following day.



WHO Simon Excell **WHERE** Les Arcs **WHEN** July 2015 **HOW** Fifth trip to Les Arcs gone wrong. Two more weeks off, then physio.

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THE BIG QUESTION

Every day, **mbr**'s forum is awash with advice, stories and gossip. Here's what you've been talking about this month.

What's the most scared you've ever been on a bike?

I went to the Alps with mates. I'm not good with heights at all, so the chairlifts were a bit of a challenge.
Steve Sordy

Technically I was not on my bike, as I was mid-air in an OTB situation. Decision was between shoulder or arm being first point of impact. Tried to cushion blow with arm but fractured elbow was the result.
Mongoosed

When I woke up in the middle of the DH track at Fort William, not knowing how long I had been out for, then having to go down it with a pulverised helmet.
MTBLeague

Maybe the first time I went on a night ride on my own. Something about night riding gets my blood pumping; I'm hyper aware, jumpy at shadows, and I feel like I get more exercise because I move much faster.
Kalasinar

Along the canals when I lived in Birmingham. Bloody geese wouldn't get out of the way and then started to hiss and flap at me.
Richm19

Night riding in Puddletown Forest. I was climbing a fire road and glanced between the trees. I could see a figure with a long cape holding a bleeding great scythe staring back at me. Turned out to be the roots of a fallen tree.
Reevil

The other week on The North Face Trail at Grizedale, flying at warp factor, straight onto a damp wooden boardwalk across a big deep muddy swamp. Thankfully managed to recover millimetres before losing it. Some guy and his teenage daughter fly across it no probs. Cool as Ice.
Neilio

NEXT MONTH

WHAT'S YOUR BEST BIKE BODGE?

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po.st/bikebodge



01



02



03



04



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YOUR PHOTOS

01 Gliding over the rocks on a fat bike in Torridon.

Photo: Colin Atkins

02 Orange Five 29 being well looked after in Merthyr Tydfil.

Photo: David Deprez

03 Amazing what you see roamin' round the hills.

Photo: Timothy Mills

04 A470 line at BikePark Wales.

Photo: Phoebe Sneddon

05 The tough climb up Chapel Gate.

Photo: Glynn Ellis



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05



CAMELBAK
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mbr
BIKE
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YEAR

2015

We've tested more than 50 bikes over the last 12 months, but only six can make it onto the shortlist for mbr's coveted Bike of the Year Award: find out which bike impressed us most and took top honours in 2015

Words Alan Muldoon Pics Roo Fowler



THE SHORTLIST



CALIBRE BOSSNUT

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CANYON STRIVE CF 9.0 RACE

£3,699.99



**SPECIALIZED CAMBER
EXPERT EVO**

£4,500



TREK MARLIN 7

£500



WHYTE 802 COMPACT

£750



WHYTE 901

£1,199



What makes **mbr's** Bike of the Year award one of the most prestigious accolades in mountain biking? For a start, we don't just dish out awards left, right and centre, as

there can only be one bike of the year. Also, it's not enough to simply be best in class; only bikes that score perfect 10 ratings in their respective group tests get shortlisted for the big event.

Given that we've put over 50 bikes through the ringer this season, and only awarded seven perfect 10 ratings, it's obvious that scoring top marks in an **mbr** shoot-out is quite an achievement in itself. One perfect 10 bike that didn't make the cut was the Vitus Escarpe 290 Pro. It easily won our Discounted

bike test in the September issue, but we didn't feel it was fair to include it here as the other bikes were all tested at full RRP.

With that caveat cleared up, this award is a great way for us to shout about the bikes that impressed us the most. It's so much more than the year in review though: we re-tested all of the shortlisted bikes again before choosing the winner. So even though this isn't like a regular **mbr** shootout, it's a perfect snapshot of all the 2015 bike tests.

Truth be told, it was a total blast getting to ride all of the best bikes of 2015 again, but with so much quality kit on offer, picking a winner was always going to be a tough call. We've got everything from £500 hardtails to £4.5k carbon enduro bikes covered, with plenty in-between. The breadth and depth of the models we've tested this year is simply staggering, and while it's a lot to squeeze into 12 short months, we wouldn't have it any other way.

Testing such a wide variety of bikes is a lot of fun, but we also take it very seriously at **mbr**. Regardless of price or application, all of the bikes that feature in the magazine are tested to the same exacting

standards. It's why we spend almost as much time in the workshop measuring them, weighing them and swapping out parts, as we do riding them. And it's about so much more than simply doing a thorough job. The test crew at **mbr** are passionate mountain bikers and, just like you, we want to know which bikes are the best; it really is that simple. As such, we wouldn't dream of recommending a bike that we didn't have 100 per cent confidence in, and that's a big part of why our bike tests are the most trusted.

TOUGH AT THE TOP

Given our lofty standards, it's hardly surprising that there are plenty of good bikes that narrowly miss out on a shot at the title. One bike that instantly springs to mind is the Giant Reign 27.5 1, which we tested in the February issue. The geometry was dialled, the rear suspension simply amazing, and it was crazy light for a 160mm-travel enduro bike with an alloy frame. We just weren't convinced that the Dual Position air RockShox Pike was the best option, as it offered less support than the Solo Air design. Splitting hairs? Possibly! But we stand



by those tough decisions month in, month out, as only the bikes that are nigh on perfect should score top marks.

And just because a bike made the cut last year, it's no guarantee that it will be back again the following season. Proof in point; Specialized's Stumpy FSR Comp Evo walked away with our 2014 Bike of the Year award, but it has had to settle for a ringside seat this time round. That's because the bar is constantly being raised, and bike manufacturers simply can't afford to rest on their laurels.

The retail landscape is also evolving, with direct sales brands playing an increasing role in the way we buy bikes. Previously, they were all about getting the best possible bang for your buck, but as Canyon and YT Industries have both proved, innovation and performance are now the driving force that's seeing more and more riders buying bikes direct from the source.

But enough about the state of play of the bike industry, let's take a closer look at the standout bikes of 2015 before we reveal the winner of this year's Bike of the Year award...

NEAR MISSES

The best of the rest

Not all our test winners made it into the Bike of the Year awards; take a closer look at the best of the rest



GIANT REIGN 27.5 1 £3,999



HIGHS

Eye watering raw speed, and rear suspension that slays everything in its path



LOWS

Divey RockShox Pike Dual Position Air fork



CANYON GRAND CANYON AL 5.9 £750



HIGHS

Low weight and high spec



LOWS

Long stem and no clutch in the rear mech



SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER COMP EVO 29 £2,500



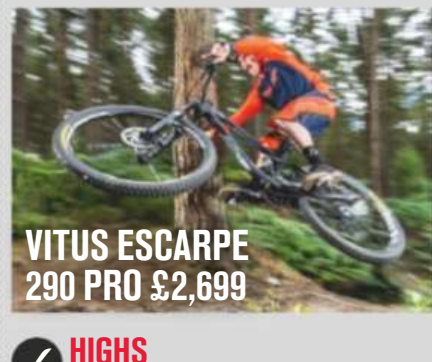
HIGHS

Supple suspension, excellent balance, sorted position and handling



LOWS

Fork is no match for the rear suspension



VITUS ESCARPE 290 PRO £2,699



HIGHS

Amazing attention to detail. Great spec and even better handling



LOWS

Slightly too high BB and at the original RRP it was too expensive

WHO WON WHAT?

2015 test winners

- **Whyte 901 £1,199** 650b trail hardtails
- **Specialized Camber Expert Evo £4,500** Supercharged 29ers
- **Nukeproof Mega TR Race £1,999.99** Sub-£2k trail bikes
- **Giant Reign 27.5 1 £3,999** Race-ready enduro bikes
- **Specialized Stumpjumper Comp Evo 29 £2,500** 29er trail slayers
- **Orbea Rallon X-Team £4,599** Enduro bikes
- **Specialized Rumor £1,500** £1,600 women's full-sussers
- **Specialized Camber £1,500** Best value trail bikes
- **Trek Marlin 7 £500** Hardtail of the Year, £500 category
- **Canyon Grand Canyon AL 5.9 £749** Hardtail of the Year, £750 category
- **Whyte 802 Compact £750** Hardtail of the Year, £750 women-specific category
- **Vitus Sentier VRS £949.99** Hardtail of the Year, £1,000 category
- **Canyon Strive CF 9.0 Race £3,699.99** Attitude-adjust enduro bikes
- **Go Outdoors Calibre Bossnut £999.99** Full-suss for £1,000
- **Trek Remedy 7 27.5 £2,000** Do-it-all trail bikes
- **Vitus Escarpe 290 Pro £2,699** Discounted 2015 bikes



CANYON STRIVE CF 9.0 RACE

£3,699.99 / 650b / canyon.com

SPECIFICATION

Frame Carbon-fibre, 163/139mm travel
Shock RockShox Monarch Plus RC3 DebonAir
Fork RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air, 160mm travel
Wheels SRAM Rail 50, Maxxis High Roller II/Minion DHR II 27.5x2.3in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM XO1 chainset, r-mech and shifter
Brakes SRAM Guide RSC, 200/180mm
Components Renthal Fatbar Carbon 780mm, Renthal Apex stem 50mm, RockShox Reverb Stealth seatpost
Sizes S, M, L
Weight 13.4kg (29.5lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested L
Head angle 66.6/67.2°
Seat angle 67.9/68.6°
BB height 337/344mm
Chainstay 423mm
Front centre 785mm
Wheelbase 1,208mm
Down tube 730mm
Top tube 648mm
Reach 468mm

NEED TO KNOW

- Race-ready enduro bike at a killer price
- Shapeshifter technology gives two geometry/travel settings
- Carbon frame boosts stiffness and saves weight
- Models with 'Race' in their name get increased reach and shorter stems

Winner of multiple design awards and our adjustable geometry enduro bike test, the Canyon Strive CF 9.0 Race is a truly amazing package that's every bit as sleek as it is innovative.

But before we get to the Shapeshifter technology that gives the Strive its split personality, we want to mention Canyon's dual sizing options. Any model that doesn't have Race in its name

gets a short front end with reduced reach and a longer stem to compensate. If you want the longest Strive available make sure it has Race in the name before buying.

With that cleared up, let's get to the heart of the design: the Shapeshifter technology. Simply press the handlebar remote while shifting your weight and a small piston repositions the shock relative to the upper suspension link, changing both the frame geometry and the progressivity of the suspension. And the beauty of this design is, that it uses a standard shock, so you're not locked into some goofy set-up.

As clever as the Shapeshifter is, it's debatable if the Strive actually needs it at all. That's because the geometry isn't particularly slack to begin with.

And, even with soft compound Maxxis tyres, the Strive spins along almost effortlessly for a 160mm bike. It's as if there's no resistance whatsoever in the SRAM 1x11 drivetrain. This efficiency is even more impressive when you consider how sensitive the rear suspension is. There's



Attitude adjust at the flick of a switch

none of the wallow we experienced testing the shorter travel Canyon Spectral and the inherent ramp-up in the rear suspension means the bike is very light to manoeuvre.

It sounds amazing, doesn't it? It really is Canyon's finest do-it-all bike yet. It's somewhat ironic, though, that the Shapeshifter technology grabs all the headlines, but the Strive CF 9.0 Race is one of the few enduro bikes we've tested that doesn't actually need adjustable geometry. So while Canyon's execution is easily the best to date, its approach isn't that different to other brands with adjustable geometry, as they all tend to be a little too conservative in downhill mode.



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SPECIALIZED CAMBER EXPERT EVO

£4,500 / 29in / specialized.com

SPECIFICATION

Frame Fact 9m Carbon/ M5 aluminium, 120mm travel
Shock Fox Float CTD Factory w/AutoSag
Fork RockShox Pike RC 29 Solo Air, 120mm travel
Wheels Roval Traverse hubs, Roval Fattie rims, Specialized Butcher/ Ground Control 29x 2.3in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM S-2200 carbon chainset, X01 mech and shifter
Brakes Shimano XT, 200/180mm
Components Specialized with Command Post IR
Sizes S, M, L, XL
Weight 12.5kg (27.6lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested L
Head angle 68.5°
Seat angle 68.5°
BB height 329mm
Chainstay 450mm
Front centre 717mm
Wheelbase 1,167mm
Down tube 706mm
Top tube 619mm
Reach 432mm

NEED TO KNOW

- Short-travel 29er that blurs the line between XC and trail
- Evo build with 120mm travel and trail-focused parts
- AutoSag technology on the rear shock makes suspension set-up easy
- SWAT kit as standard

For the third year in a row, Specialized's Camber Evo plays a supporting role in our Bike of the Year awards. This time round, it's the turn of the Expert Evo model, the second most expensive bike in the four-strong Camber range. With its lightweight carbon front end, SRAM 1x11 drivetrain and Shimano XT brakes, the Expert Evo really showcases what a 120mm-travel 29er can do.

Up or down, the Camber absolutely rips. And the key to unlocking its full potential is undoubtedly the 120mm-travel RockShox Pike fork. The extra security and stiffness of the beefy 35mm chassis gives you the confidence to hit lines and attack trails that are simply out of reach to lesser 29ers. Tuck in behind the fork and let the momentum of the big wheels take your breath away. It's a heady combination of speed and control, so it's hardly surprising that, when we tested the Camber back in December, it proved once again that it's the short travel 29er to beat.

On paper, the Camber Evo doesn't have the most progressive sizing or aggressive geometry, and that's probably because this iteration is now three years old. But that doesn't mean for a minute that the Camber isn't relevant. With its super-low bottom bracket and sublime rear suspension it's still in a class of its own. Best of all, with Specialized's AutoSag feature on the Fox



CTD rear shock you don't need a degree in engineering to attain the perfect set-up. It really is just pump and play! And if speed and efficiency are the order of the day, you need do nothing more than flick the compression lever on the shock into Trail or Climb mode for a more XC bias.

So the Expert Camber Evo narrowly misses out once again. It doesn't walk away empty-handed though, as it's still the star of the 29er show. Specialized has completely reworked the Camber range for 2016, and from what we've seen of it, there's every chance that the new version will be in the running again this time next year.





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Orange CRUSH S 27.5" 2016

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2016

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WAS £999 NOW £849
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TREK MARLIN 7

£500 / 29in / trekbikes.com

SPECIFICATION

Frame Alpha Silver aluminium
Fork Suntour XCT, 100mm travel
Wheels Formula DC20/DC22 hubs, Bontrager AT-650 rims and XR1 29x2.2/2.0in tyres
Drivetrain Shimano M371 chainset, Altus shifters and mechs
Brakes Tektro Auriga, 160mm
Components Bontrager
Sizes 13.5, 15.5, 17.5, 18.5, 19.5, 21.5, 23in
Weight 14.4kg (31.7lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested 19.5in
Head angle 69.6°
Seat angle 72°
BB height 316mm
Chainstay 445mm
Front centre 699mm
Wheelbase 1,144mm
Down tube 705mm
Top tube 639mm
Reach 444mm

NEED TO KNOW

- 29in hardtail that's fast and fun
- Suntour XCT fork has 100mm of travel
- Bontrager's low-profile tyres roll effortlessly and offer good grip too
- With seven frame sizes to choose from, getting the perfect fit couldn't be easier

It pains us to say it, but the truth is, bells and whistles help sell bikes. Thankfully, Trek hasn't been sucked into the lock-out trap, that usually sees entry-level fork performance falter at the very first hurdle. Instead, the 100mm-travel, coil-sprung, Suntour XCT on the Marlin 7 is incredibly sensitive to even the smallest ripples on the trail, providing a level of grip, comfort and control that even the most gifted salesperson couldn't

convey on the shop floor.

When it comes to choosing a new bike, looks are important too, which is why Trek offers a viper red version to complement the rather dreary slate grey option tested here. Take a closer look at the Marlin 7 and it quickly becomes apparent that the lightweight alloy frame is a quality piece of kit; the oversized down tube forming a solid backbone from which to hang those big 29in wheels. The rear stays are slender, and offer a modicum of comfort, and tyre clearance is also ample. The Marlin 7 won't grind to a halt then, when the weather takes a turn for the worse, or you mistakenly turn on to a bridleway that's been churned up by horses.

Yes, the fork on the Trek tops out violently at full extension, when launching off jumps or smashing through rock gardens, but that's standard practice on most £500 bikes, so it's important not to lose perspective here. It's probably more telling that we were happy sending the Marlin



Control and comfort, courtesy of Suntour

7 down the steepest, nastiest trails we could find in the first place, whooping and hollering along the way.

For a bike that we initially thought would be more at home comfortably clocking up the miles, on fire roads and towpaths, the Marlin 7 quickly revealed its darker side. And once we discovered what this 29er was capable of, it got the jump on the other bikes in the £500 category of our Hardtail of the Year test and never looked back. So if you're getting into mountain biking for the first time, and you've got £500 burning a hole in your pocket, the Trek Marlin 7 is the only bike you'll need.





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WHYTE 802 COMPACT

£750 / 650b / whyte.bike

NEED TO KNOW

- 650b hardtail designed specifically for shorter riders
- Air-sprung 100mm-travel RockShox XC30 fork can handle a wide range of rider weights
- Slim grips and short stems reinforce the compact theme
- Fast-rolling Maxxis Ikon tyres are ideal for trail centre hacks

Whyte isn't a brand to blindly follow fashion; it's an innovator. So, when the time came to rethink women's hardtails, it got straight to the crux of the problem: sizing. Instead of getting sidetracked by gender, Whyte realised that small women and men actually have the same needs when it comes to getting a mountain bike that fits. Enter the 802 Compact.



Granted, the geometry isn't as extreme as Whyte's 900 series trail hardtails, but standover clearance is every bit as generous and, combined with 650b wheels, the 802 Compact offers smaller riders unparalleled responsiveness on tight, twisty singletrack. We know this because we pitted the 802 Compact against the best women-specific bikes from Specialized, Trek and Pinnacle back in June as part of our Hardtail of the Year test.

Getting an air-sprung fork on any £750 hardtail is a bonus, but it's even more critical for riders of smaller stature. They are lighter than coil-sprung units and allow you to get the perfect spring rate for your weight. Granted, if you're under 55kg you'll be off the scale of recommended pressures printed on the fork, but don't be afraid to let some air out if you aren't getting close to using the full 100mm of travel.

With the RockShox XC30 fork set up for our weight, the bike simply flew; the short stem and quality tyres giving the

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061 Hydroformed T6 Aluminium
Fork RockShox XC30 Solo air, 100mm travel
Wheels Alloy hubs, Whyte XC-22 rims, Maxxis Ikon 27.5x2.2in tyres
Drivetrain Shimano M391 chainset, Shimano Acera shifters and f-mech, Deore r-mech
Brakes Tektro Auriga WDS compact
Components Whyte
Sizes XS, S, M
Weight 13.21kg (29.12lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested S
Head angle 68.5°
Seat angle 73.5°
BB height 304mm
Chainstay 435mm
Front centre 664mm
Wheelbase 1,099mm
Down tube 670mm
Top tube 586mm
Reach 450mm

Stubby own-brand stem boosts control



confidence to push the Whyte to our limits and beyond. In fact, it had us shooting off drops and hitting jumps that we hadn't felt comfortable doing on the other test bikes.

The only criticism that we could level at the Whyte 802 Compact was that the Tektro brake levers were on the very limit of reach adjustment for small hands. There's no faulting them for stopping power and feel, though, but it would have been nice to get the lever blades a hair closer to the slender grips. Other than that, this bike offers an engaging, fun ride, that's ideal for women or vertically challenged men.

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WHYTE 901

£1,199 / 650b / whyte.bike

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061-T6 aluminium
Fork RockShox Sektor Gold RL, 130mm travel
Wheels Whyte hubs, Whyte Trail rims, Maxxis Ardent/Ardent Race 27.5x2.25/2.2in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM S1000 chainset, SRAM X7 r-mech, X5 shifters and f-mech
Brakes Avid DB3, 180/160mm
Components Whyte
Sizes S, M, L, XL
Weight 12.6kg (27.7lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested M
Head angle 66.5°
Seat angle 72.3°
BB height 302mm
Chainstay 424mm
Front centre 720mm
Wheelbase 1,144mm
Down tube 703mm
Top tube 618mm
Reach 427mm

NEED TO KNOW

- Best trail hardtail bar none
- Entry-level bike of three: 901, 905 and 909
- Lightweight alloy frame with cutting-edge geometry
- Short stem and wide handlebar enhance control
- Has stealth routing for a dropper seatpost

We've tested more hardtails this season than ever before. And at the risk of starting to sound like a broken record, one bike stood head and shoulders above the rest. It really needs no introduction, as the ride quality of the Whyte 901 speaks volumes: it handles like a dream, the frame is stiff and reassuringly direct, without being too jarring, and nothing about the spec or

riding position prevents you from going as fast as you dare. In fact, the only limiting factors on the 901 are your creativity on the trail and the strength of your ankles.

Up front, the 130mm-travel RockShox Sektor fork hits the sweetspot between comfort and control; taking all-comers in its stride without leaving you feeling punch drunk due to extreme geometry swings. Given the confidence inspired by the 901 on steeper terrain, it would benefit from a fork with a beefier chassis, but seeing as the weight and price of the bike would both creep up as a result, the Sektor counts as a good compromise.

In fact, all of the parts adorning the 901 are functional rather than fancy, and if you take a cursory glance online you'll find a string of trail hardtails with seemingly better credentials. The thing is, we've ridden or tested most of those bikes and, while they all claim to be trail-focused, none come close to matching the Whyte 901's need for speed. That's because up-specing a



Whyte supply the compact cockpit

rear mech or fitting to 1x drivetrain is purely about cost, but it is the DNA of the frame that really makes a hardtail come to life — the components are just along for the ride.

In producing the 901, Whyte has mapped the genome for the ultimate trail hardtail. That information is all in the public domain — in fact, the 901's vital stats are printed on this very page — and it's only a matter of time before one of the direct-sales brands figures out how to put all of the pieces of the puzzle together with a higher spec or lower price tag. Until that day comes, however, the Whyte 901 is still the best hardtail money can buy.



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CALIBRE BOSSNUT

£999.99 / 650b / gooutdoors.co.uk

NEED TO KNOW

- Calibre is GoOutdoors' in-house bicycle brand
- The Bossnut rolls on 650b (27.5in wheels)
- RockShox suspension delivers 130mm travel front and back
- Shimano drivetrain and brakes are simply amazing

When the Calibre Bossnut arrived for the £1,000 suspension bike test that we featured in our Summer 2015 issue, the first thing we did was pick up the phone and call GoOutdoors to double-check that we hadn't been sent the wrong bike. That's because the Bossnut simply looked too good to be true!

And it wasn't just parts like the 2x10 Shimano drivetrain — with its chain-silencing clutch rear mech — and the thru-axle RockShox Sektor fork that made us question the pricing. No, the frame quality was also standout. It had a great profile, and the smooth welds and ultra-neat pivot hardware gave it a distinctly classy feel that wouldn't have looked out of place on a bike costing double the money.

Sizing was spot-on too. And even though there are only three options to choose from, because the fit of the 19.5in is perfect for anyone around 5ft 11in, taller riders can easily opt for the 21in, while shorter riders will have no issues throwing a leg over the 17.5in.

It's not just the fundamentals that Calibre has focused on, though; every single component on the Bossnut has been agonised over. Take the tyres, for instance.

A big, knobbly 2.3in WTB Vigilante up front gives you all the confidence you need to slam the bike in and out of corners, while the shallow-tread Beeline 2.2in on the rear keeps the Bossnut bowling along at a blistering pace.

The cockpit is sorted too, with a sensible 70mm Ritchey stem complementing the reach of the frame perfectly, while the ample width 760mm bar aids steering

You can rock up to any trail on the Bossnut and ride it full gas, rather than simply hanging on for survival



precision and control without being so wide that you'll find yourself inadvertently punching trees on tighter trails.

OK, so there's no dropper seatpost, but given that the Bossnut has a better specification than most £1,000 hardtails, we can certainly forgive it that omission. And if you do want to fit your own dropper, there are line-guides dotted along the underside of the top tube for doing just that. Yep, it really does seem as if Calibre has thought of everything.

It's not just the amazing spec, attention to detail or killer price tag that really makes the Bossnut so special, though. Sure, they all help massively, but if it weren't for the equally impressive ride quality, it would not be walking away with our 2015 Bike of the Year award.



Grand design: the Bossnut can't be beaten for £1k

Out on the trail, the Bossnut is every bit as sure-footed and confident as its appearance suggests. You never have to second-guess how it's going to react, and this makes it an incredibly easy bike to ride. It's solid too, so it won't feel like a wet noodle even if you're carrying a bit of extra timber around your midriff.

What makes it great, though, is that it's a total blast to ride. You can rock up to any trail on the Bossnut and ride it full gas, rather than simply hanging on for survival. That's a major step forward for a £1,000 suspension bike, and that's only possible because every little detail has been taken care of. All you need to do is relax and enjoy the ride.

When we first tested the Bossnut, it was easily the standout bike in its class. Riding it again for the Bike of the Year awards, only this time back to back with category-leaders like the Whyte 901, Specialized Camber and Canyon Strive, really brought home to us what a groundbreaking bike it is.



Clutch rear mech keeps shifts clean and quiet

And, just as Voodoo rewrote the rulebook in the £600 hardtail category three years ago with its Bizango 29, Calibre is sending a seismic shock wave through the £1,000 full-suspension category, with ripples that will be felt far and wide. It truly is a landmark bike, and we only wish that £1,000 had bought this much fun 20 years ago when we first started mountain biking.

SPECIFICATION

Frame Calibre aluminium, 130mm travel
Shock RockShox Monarch R
Fork RockShox Sektor Silver, 130mm travel
Wheels Shimano Deore hubs, WTB Sti 23 rims, WTB Vigilante/Beeline 27.5x2.3/2.2in tyres
Drivetrain Shimano Deore chainset, mechs and shifters
Brakes Shimano Deore, 180/160mm
Components Ritchey, WTB Volt saddle
Sizes 17.5, 19.5, 21.5in
Weight 14.4kg (31.7lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested 19.5in
Head angle 67.1°
Seat angle 73.4°
BB height 341mm
Chainstay 437mm
Front centre 707mm
Wheelbase 1,144mm
Down tube 673mm
Top tube 607mm
Reach 425mm



Dropper post cable guides are mounted under the top tube



2013 GIANT ANTHEM X2

Alloy frame, Rockshox Monarch rear shock, Rockshox Reba RL fork, 30 Speed Shimano Deore gearing and disc brakes. rrp £1700 now £979.99



2014 GIANT ANTHEM 27.5 3

Alloy suspension frame, Rockshox forks and shock, 20 speed Shimano Deore SLX gearing, Shimano disc brakes. rrp £1590 now £1086.99



2014 SCOTT SCALE 735

Carbon frame, Rockshox XC20 fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/XT gearing and brakes. Synchron finishing kit. RRP £1800 now £1199.99



2013 CANNONDALE TRAIL SL1

Rockshox reclin air fork, 30 speed Shimano Deore/XT gearing, Shimano hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £1100 NOW £873.99



2013 GIANT GLORY FRAME

8" travel Maestro alloy suspension frame, Rockshox Vivid R2C Air rear shock, 12mm axle. rrp £2000 now £649.99



2013 CANNONDALE TRIGGER 29ER 3

Alloy frame, X Fusion rear shock, Rockshox Revelation fork, 20 Speed Shimano SLX, XT, Magura disc brakes. rrp £2000 now £1308.99



2014 CUBE LTD RACE 29

Alloy hardtail, Rockshox Reba RL, Poploc fork, 30 speed Shimano SLX/XT gearing, XT hubs and Deore hydraulic disc brakes. rrp £1100 now £879.99



2014 MONGOOSE SALVO COMP 29

Full Suspension frame, X Fusion rear shock, Suntour fork, 27 speed Shimano Alivio gearing with Vague hydraulic disc brakes. rrp £1100 now £838.99



2014 CANNONDALE TANGO 29 5

Women's 29er, hardtail, Suntour lock out forks, 27 speed Shimano Alivio/Alivio gearing, Cannondale hydraulic disc brakes. rrp £600 now £359.99



2014 CANNONDALE F29 5

Alloy frame 29er, Lefty RBR 90 fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/SLX gearing, Shimano hydraulic disc brakes, Suntour wheel rim. rrp £2000 now £1199.99



2013 GIANT TRANCE X29ER 2

Alloy suspension 29er frame, Rockshox mon fork, Monarch rear shock, Suntour 20 speed gearing, Shimano disc brakes. rrp £1500 NOW ONLY £1049.99



2013 CANNONDALE TRIGGER CRB 1

H Mid carbon frame, Carbon Lefty fork, Fox Dyd rear, 20 Speed Shimano XT/XT8, XTR Brakes, Reynolds Carbon wheels. RRP £5500 now £2499.99



2014 CANNONDALE TRAIL SL29 3

Alloy frame, Rockshox XC30 fork, 27 speed Shimano Alivio/Deore gearing, Shimano hydraulic disc brakes. rrp £800 now £488.99



2014 GIANT XTC ADVANCED 27.5 2

Carbon frame, Fox 32 12mm fork, 20 Speed Shimano XT/XTR gearing, XT disc brakes, Giant wheels by DT Swiss. rrp £2200 now £1799.99



2013 CANNONDALE JEKYLL 3

Alloy frame, Fox 32 fork, Fox Dyd rear shock, 20 speed Shimano SLX/XT gearing, Magura MT2 brakes. rrp £3200 now £1599.99

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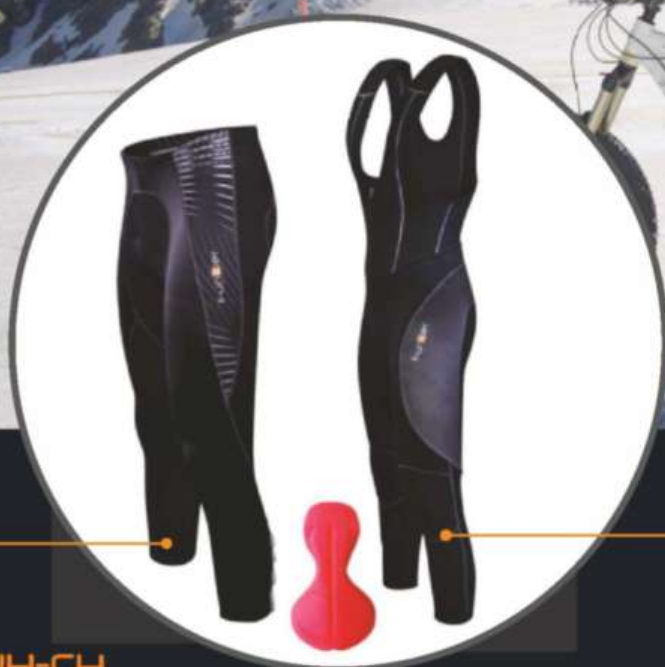
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This month's routes

WHERE TO RIDE AND EXPLORE

01 HARD ROUTE

GOATHLAND/ NORTH YORK MOORS

34km (21 miles)

This route was conceived by Adrian Carter of Pace Cycles fame. He has spent decades exploring the North Yorkshire Moors and the many forests that decorate this part of the world. His 35km route incorporates the best of both worlds, with heather-lined singletrack and a few steep plunges through the pine.

Start in Newton-on-Rawcliffe and drop on steep, forested trails to Levisham station on the scenic North York Moors Railway and its evocative steam service that runs between Pickering and Whitby. It's a grind out of the deep dale onto Levisham Moor, but there's plenty of time to spin your legs out on the next leg to the Hole of Horcum, which legend has it was formed when a giant threw earth during a matrimonial spat. Here you can choose to extend your ride to include some of Dalby Forest's purpose-built singletrack or continue the ride around RAF Fylingdales, the MoD missile early warning station. There's often a burger van in the lay-by up there, should you need an energy hit. The return stint heads across Simon Howe Rigg and enters Cropton Forest, before a short road spin takes you back to Newton-on-Rawcliffe.



The North York Moors:
head across the heather
for a wild adventure



02 EASY ROUTE

WOOTTON COMMON, EXMOOR

20km (12 miles)

This relaxed little outing runs along the hilltops that lie just inland of Minehead. It starts easily; lanes followed by good stony tracks, but the ante gets upped with pretty much every kilometre. Real effort is required to clamber up over Tivington Common onto the route's high point of Wootton Common, with views stretching over to Dunster Beach. You'll be chomping at the bit by now and have nearly 300 vertical metres to lose, and some great singletrack to finish it off with. It's steep, but doable. There's an alternative route down if you don't fancy it.

03 MEDIUM ROUTE

USWAY BURN, CHEVIOT HILLS

22km (13.5 miles)

The natural singletrack that follows the Usway Burn away from the Scottish border is an absolute treat. Narrow in places, exposed in others and just plain good fun at times. The only downside is that there's no easy way to get to the start of it. An off-road approach via Clennell Street is possible, but it makes for a pretty big outing. A lot easier is a gentle warm-up on the lane that leads up the stunning Coquetdale; from Barrowburn it's just a case of hurdling Middle Hill and the fun starts. Save a bit of energy though; there's a sting in the tail on this one.

04 HARD ROUTE

BARLAVINGTON DOWN, SOUTH DOWNS

39km (24 miles)

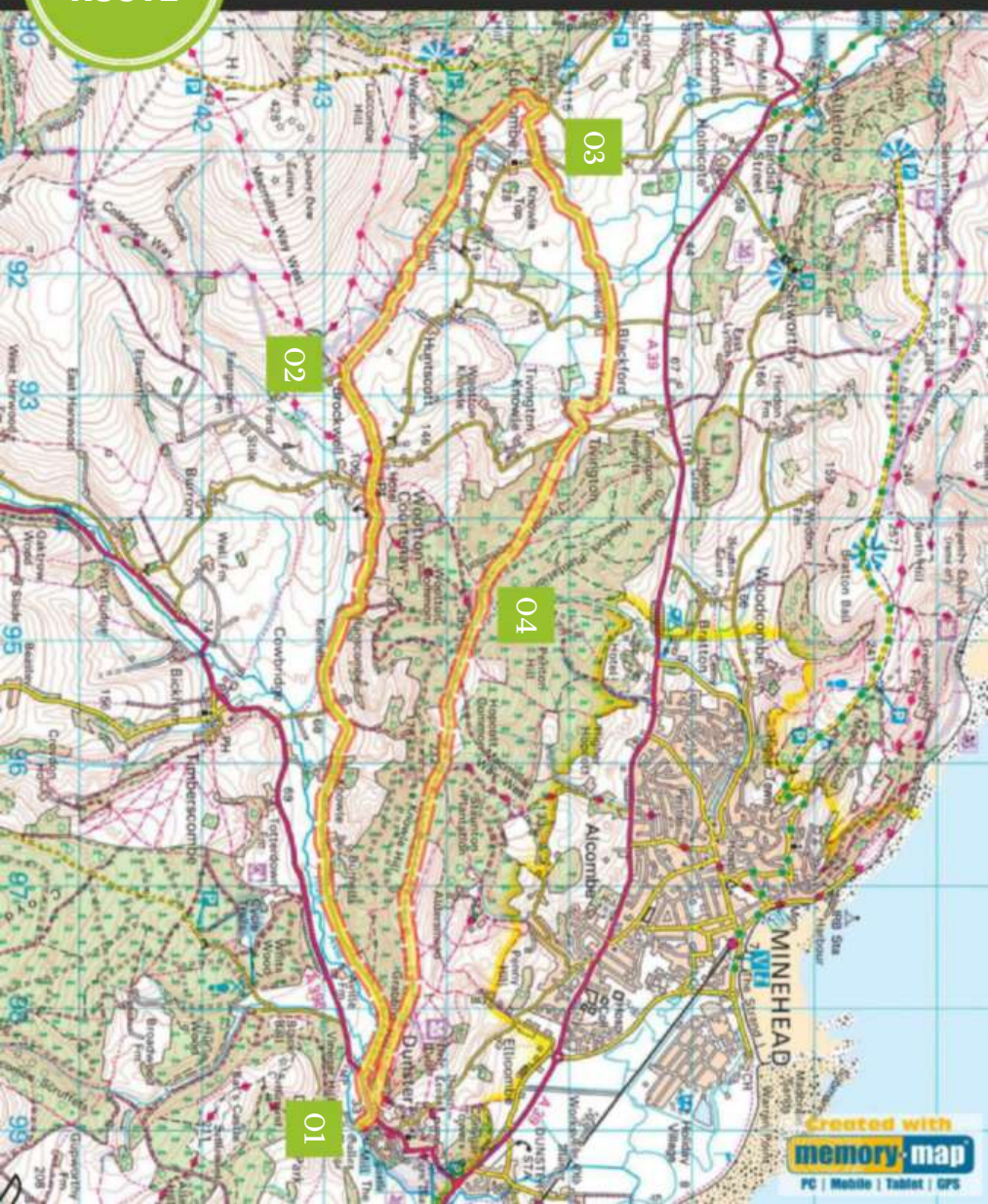
Getting a few kilometres under your belt on the South Downs really feels like you've been on a journey. The ups and downs are never that long, but they add up over a big ride. And the lay of the land stretches most rides out along the Downs, meaning it's a fair distance from one end to the other. This is a great loop, with some great trails mixed in with the more typical chalky top layer. The highlight is probably the drop into Houghton. It has an auspicious start but the singletrack through the trees is just wonderful. Shame it's not a bit longer.

EASY
ROUTE

WOOTTON COMMON, EXMOOR

20km (12 miles)

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WOOTTON COMMON, EXMOOR

20km (12 miles)

WAY TO GO

01 START (OS181/SS989432). Car park, Park St. Dunster

Head back onto the A396 then after 500m turn R onto a narrow lane. Follow this easily for 3km, where you keep SA at a T-junction. Continue now for another 2km through Wootton Courtenay and around L and R bends to a junction with two L turns. Take the first (Brockwell and Ford) and continue to Brockwell.

02 (SS928431) Brockwell. Distance so far: 6.7km

Turn R onto a broad track (not the clearly waymarked BWs) and this becomes a stony trail. Follow it up and down for over 2km to a fork in clearing. Keep SA and continue to a X-roads, where you keep SA again (Chapel Cross). Contour around on a broad track that leads to a road. Turn R and then sharp R to drop into Luccombe.

03 (SS910447) Luccombe. Distance so far: 10.5km

Ignore the first L and cross the bridge before taking the second L. Follow this for 1.5km and keep SA onto another lane as it bends L. This swings immediately R. Keep SA onto a grassy track and follow this to a T-junction where you swing R to another T-junction. Turn L and then at the top, sharp R. After another 200m, turn L onto a waymarked BW (Tivington). Stay on the main track and climb past a number of junctions to the trig point (hidden in the trees).

04 (NY948442) Trig Point, Wootton Common. Distance so far: 15.4km

Keep SA, always on the main track — Macmillans Way. Keep L at a fork (Grabbist Hill), then keep L again at the next towards Dunster. Stay on the main track to another fork, where you keep SA (signed Very Steep). Follow this down and turn sharp R at a gate to follow singletrack to the road. Turn L and then L again to retrace your earlier tracks to the car.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 20KM (12 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 680M (2,231FT)

GETTING THERE

Dunster is a few miles SE of Minehead on the A39.

Approximately an hour west of Bridgwater and the M5. The route starts from a small car park in Park Street, south of the village centre. (OS181/SS989432). Rail access is possible from Minehead.

BEST TIME TO GO

This is quite a sticky area and the trails definitely run better at dryer times of the year. It's pretty sheltered though, so not a disaster on a bad day.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 1

OS Landranger Series (1:50,000)
181 Minehead and the Brendon Hills

OS Explorer Series (1:25,000)
OL9 Exmoor

South West Mountain Biking
by Nick Cotton (Vertebrate Publishing)

REFRESHMENTS

Seasonal tea shops at Horner, 1km north of the route at Luccombe.

FACILITIES

The Stag Inn is just a short distance from the car park, and worth a visit.

Youth Hostel at Minehead,
0845 371 9033.

Plenty of other accommodation in the area.

Minehead TIC, 01643 702624.

Exmoor Visitor Centre, Dunster,
01643 821835.

OTHER OPTIONS

Check out the Medium from Porlock we ran in the May 2015 Issue, or a top-notch Hard in Summer 2014. There's plenty to go at around here.

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MEDIUM ROUTE

USWAY BURN, CHEVIOT HILLS

22km (13.5 miles)



WAY TO GO

01 **START (OS80/NT919063) Car park, Alwinton**

Turn R out of the car park and ride up the dale on the road for 9km, where you'll pass a car park on the L. Continue over a bridge over the Coquet River, and turn R onto the drive of Barrowburn Farm.

02 **(NT866107) Barrowburn Farm Drive. Distance so far: 9.3km**

Pass the tea room and continue to a junction, where you turn R then swing L past a wooden building. Climb then drop to the banks of the stream, and stay with the main track as it climbs very steeply into Kidland Forest. Keep R as it levels and drops to a junction in a clearing, where you turn R over a bridge.

03 **(NT876123) Bridge near Fairhaugh. Distance so far: 11.6km**

Turn R to follow the narrow track past the house onto a broad track and then turn immediately R, onto a narrow singletrack (easy to miss). Follow this through a wooded section and then alongside the Usway Burn all the way to Batailshiel Haugh, where it turns uphill around the farm and then drops to a gate and a broad track. Follow this easily down to Shillmoor.

04 **(NT885077) Shillmoor. Distance so far: 17.8km**

Turn L into the yard (don't go onto the road) and pass through a gate and over a stream. Then, as the broad track starts to climb, fork R off of it, onto a grassy track that runs along the wall. Follow this around the hillside, over two small streams, and then climb steeply to a saddle. Keep SA and cross a broad track and another burn before dropping sweetly to the road. Turn L to finish.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 22KM (13.5 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 600M (1,968FT)

GETTING THERE

Start from the National Park car park in Alwinton (OS80/NT919063). Alwinton is around 30 miles north of Hexham and Corbridge, and easiest approached from the A696 from Newcastle, or the A697 from Morpeth. Rail's really not an option.

BEST TIME TO GO

These trails drain reasonably well so recent rain won't be a problem. It doesn't get too high either, so is suitable for bad days.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 4

OS Landranger (1:50,000)

80 Cheviot Hills & Kielder Water

OS Outdoor Leisure Series (1:25,000)

16 Cheviot Hills

Mountain Bike Guide; Northumberland by Derek Purdy (Ernest Press)

REFRESHMENTS

There's a great tea shop at Barrowburn, early on, but after that you're on your own.

FACILITIES

The Rose and Thistle, Alwinton is the closest pub to the start.

The Barrowburn Teashop is friendly and excellent value, and also does B&B and Bunkhouse accommodation, 01669 621176, barrowburn.com

For B&B, try the Rose and Thistle, 01669 650226, roseandthistlealwinton.com; or Parsonside House, 01669 650 275.

Otterburn TIC, 01830 520093.

OTHER OPTIONS

We featured an excellent Hard from Blanchland, a little further south, in December 2014. Or check out the trails at Kielder Forest.

**HARD
ROUTE**

NORTH YORK MOORS

34km (21 miles)

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HARD ROUTE

NORTH YORK MOORS

34km (21 miles)

WAY TO GO

01 **START (OS100 & 101/SE812606) Newton-on-Rawcliffe**

Head north out of the village and as the road bends to the left, turn right onto the BW. Bear right after 300m and descend to the valley road. Turn right on the road toward Levisham station. Cross the railway and climb the steep road out of the valley. As the road levels out before a sweeping bend to the R, go L on the BW across the grass. After 400m turn R and climb to the top of the rigg.

02 **(SE822919) Levisham Moor**

Once at the top, keep the stone wall on your right and follow the BW. At the crossroads, turn left to continue past Dundale Pond. Follow the well-surfaced trail to the A169 at the Hole of Horcum. Turn right and carefully cross the A169 just before the viewpoint car park. Follow the lane for 200m and turn left onto a BW alongside a narrow strip of woodland. At the gate, the BW heads NE through the field and descends to Malo Cross.

03 **(SE867950) Malo Cross**

Go SA through the gate and onto the N/S fire road. Turn L towards Fylingdales. As the road bends to the L, go R through a gate onto the BW and skirt the edge of the base. The track will eventually disappear on the eastern edge, but a permissive BW follows the line of wooden stakes embedded in the ground. Follow these marker posts as they sweep round to meet the A169 at Eller Beck Bridge.

04 **(SE858983) Eller Beck Bridge**

Turn R onto the A169 and almost immediately L onto a minor road. Stay on this road to the T-junction just outside Goathland. Turn L onto a BW initially heading due S. Climb onto the rigg and stay on the trail across the top of Howl Moor (past cairns) and drop down to the edge of Cropton Forest. Stay on the BW into the forest, crossing two fire roads. At the third fire road turn left, then first right. At the forest road T-junction go L and stay on this forest road until it turns into surfaced road. Leave the forest and drop down to a T-junction. Turn L and follow the road back to Newton-on-Rawcliffe.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 34KM (21 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 535M (1,755FT)

GETTING THERE

To get to Pickering, use the A1M, A64 (York/Malton) and A169. From Pickering, use the minor road (signs to the NYMR) to get to Newton-on-Rawcliffe. From the North, the A1, A168 and A170 are probably your best bet to reach Pickering. Travelling by rail's not really an option.

BEST TIME TO GO

Definitely a better summer ride than winter. The moorland trails get boggy and slow after rain.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Northern Edition, Region 4

OS Landranger (1:50,000)
100, 101

OS Explorer (1:25,000) 26

REFRESHMENTS

There's a vending machine at Levisham Station. If you can hold out until you reach Goathland, there's the Mallyan Spout Hotel (mallyanspout.co.uk), The Inn on the Moor (innonthemoorhotel.co.uk) and The Goathland (thegoathlandhotel.co.uk).

FACILITIES

For bike-friendly accommodation and guiding, drop Gone Mountain Biking a line. They're based in Pickering and run a shop and B&B, 01751 475111, gonemountainbiking.com

Within Dalby Forest there's Dalby Bike Barn's bike shop/cafe, 01751 460049, dalbybikebarn.co.uk

OTHER OPTIONS

There's plenty of exploring to be done in Dalby Forest. For great guided rides contact Gone Mountain Biking.

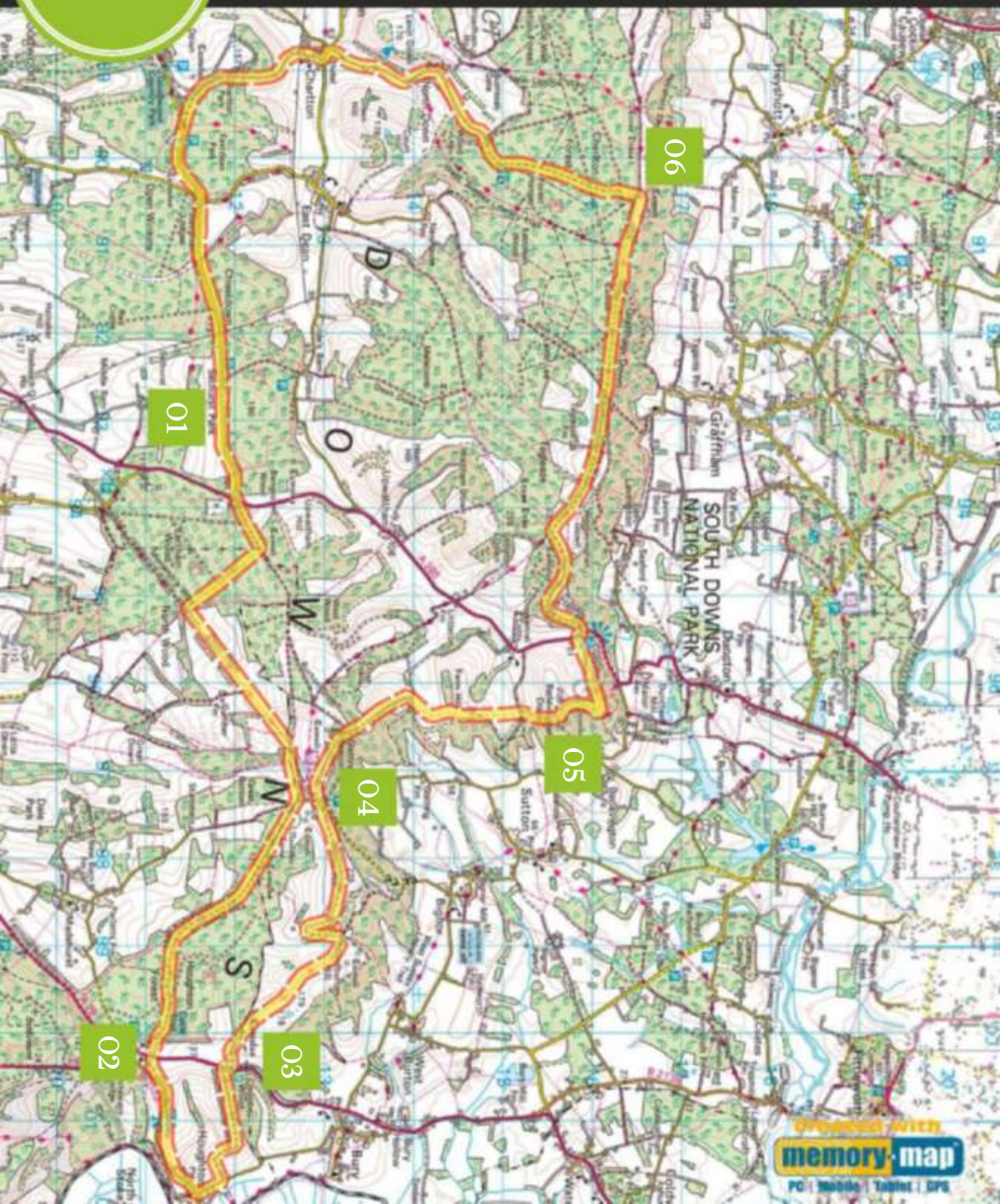


**HARD
ROUTE**

BARLAVINGTON DOWN, STH DOWNS

39km (24 miles)

Maps created with Memory-Map © Crown copyright Ordnance Survey 100034184



HARD ROUTE

BARLAVINGTON DOWN, SOUTH DOWNS

39km (24 miles)

WAY TO GO

01 **START (OS197/SU935120)**

Selhurst Park car park

Turn L onto the road and follow it to its end. Keep SA (BW) and take the first BW on the R. Descend to a large six-way junction. Turn second L (Bignor) for 2km to a gate and a T-junction (barrier ahead). Turn R and stay on the main track SA over a X-roads to descend. Ignore R fork when it levels and continue to large X-roads where you keep SA. Follow this around to the R, to a gate, and then, just after this, turn L onto a singletrack BW. Turn R onto a track and follow it to the road.



02 **(TQ002111) A29. Distance so far: 9.3km**

Go SA and drop through a field to a wood. Keep SA and descend through the wood then along the side to a left bend onto a house drive. Keep SA across this and continue down to the road. Turn L and ride through Haughton, turning L at the first junction. Continue for 500m and turn L onto a BW (SDW). Climb steeply to the road and go SA (R then L) to continue on the SDW to a X-roads of tracks.

03 **(TQ000120) X-roads of tracks. Distance so far: 13.4km**

Keep SA (SDW) with two tracks dropping to your L. Continue for 2km to drop to a farm. Turn L here and climb very steeply onto Bignor Hill. Stay on the main track, keeping R at a tight RH bend and then drop to a car park beneath two masts.

04 **(SU973129) Car park beneath masts. Distance so far: 17.3km**

Keep SA, on the main track, (SDW) and then, after 300m, take the R fork to climb up to the masts. Keep SA, with the masts on L, to descend for 1km and then, as this goes L, turn R onto a waymarked BW. Keep SA on the first track and continue to a gate. Turn R and continue through another gate, across another track, and then climb steeply onto Barlavington Down.

05 **(SU963155) Barlavington Down. Distance so far: 20.8km**

Keep SA and descend for 600m then turn L and L again onto a broad track. Follow this to the edge of the wood and across a field to the road. Keep SA onto a broad track and swing L at quarry gates (waymarked BW) to climb steeply up to a X-roads of tracks with two fingerboards. Turn R onto the SDW, which you follow for 4km to a sharp L and the R bend. Immediately after this, turn L onto a waymarked BW.

06 **(SU904165) Bridleway Junction on SDW. Distance so far: 28km.**

Follow this SA at a X-roads and to a T-junction. Turn R and continue down to a road junction in Charlton. Turn L and then R (opposite pub) and follow BW markers through a gate to climb steeply to the road at Goodwood. Turn sharp L (waymarked BW) onto a singletrack and follow this to its end. Turn R and immediately L to follow the road back to the car park.

GETTING THERE

Start at the Selhurst Park Picnic Area (OS197/SU935120), which is easily reached from the A285, 10 miles NE of Chichester. Rail users can ride the route from Amberley, adding no more than two easy road kilometres to the total.

BEST TIME TO GO

Generally pretty good surfaces that drain well, but the white clay which makes up a lot of the tracks is like eel skin when wet. Busy with walkers most of the way around.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 1

OS Landranger (1:50,000)

197 Chichester & the Downs

OS Explorer Series (1:25,000) 120 Chichester, South Harting & Selsey

South East Mountain Biking by Nick Cotton (Vertebrate Publishing)

REFRESHMENTS

The Fox Goes Free at Charlton is just a few miles from the finish.

FACILITIES

Youth Hostel at nearby Arundel, 0845 371 9002.

Pub B&B a few miles from the start: The Fox Goes Free, Charlton, 01243 811461.

Chichester TIC, 01243 775888.

Arundel TIC, 01903 882268.

OTHER OPTIONS

We brought you a great little Easy from nearby Stoughton in the Summer 2015 issue. There's a few sweet downhill trails there too.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 39KM (24 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 900M (2,953FT)

TRAIL
CENTRE
FOCUS

Xc MARKS THE SPOT

Dalby Forest's World Cup cross-country race track has been open to the public for years, but does it offer a suitable challenge for trail riders? Only one way to find out...

Words and photos: Sim Mainey

In association with



It's fair to say that as a nation we have an easier time getting our heads around downhill racing than cross-country. In part that's down to familiarity — we're lucky enough to have the DH World Cup rock up to Fort William every year, forming a prestigious and permanent, well-attended fixture on the international racing calendar. In contrast we only get World Cup XC races sporadically. This lack of interaction with top-level XC racing can lead to lazy stereotypes, such as that XC racers are all actually roadies, lack any real off-road skill and have stems more suited to the back of a barge than the front of a mountain bike.

A lot of those preconceptions were ridden into the Yorkshire mud in 2010 when the XC World Cup circus came to Dalby Forest. Rather than a sprint around the edge of a field (as many people thought it was going to be), the course threw in plenty of technical features: rock drops, root-covered descents, high-speed singletrack and super-tight twists and turns. Armed only with a token gesture to suspension and Lycra skinsuits, the top racers took the course apart, leaving plenty of spectators wondering if they'd be able to survive the challenging course. And after the circus left town the public got a chance to find out, as the course was incorporated into the trail network — and that's why, five years later, I'm at Dalby Forest trying to get my race head on.

Unlike Nino Schurter or Julien Absalon in 2010, Dan and I arrive with a full complement of leg hair, baggy shorts and long-travel full-suspension bikes. We are the epitome of the modern trail rider and we're here to see just how hard a World Cup XC course really is. Dalby's black trail, the old World Cup course, is only 6.4km so, rather

TRAIL
CENTRE
FOCUS

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Trail centres were invented right here in the UK. No other country has such an extensive network of artfully crafted trails, from Glentworth in the borders of Scotland down to Queen Elizabeth Country Park in the heart of the South Downs. And with no two trail centres alike, we're making it our mission to bring you the best of manmade singletrack in the country. From the newest trails that flow like water to the old, rocky legacies of the 90s, every trail and trail centre has a story to tell. There's a broad depth of quality to be enjoyed by everyone, whether you're after a quick half-hour fix or an all-day ride.

WE'RE HERE TO SEE
JUST HOW HARD A
WORLD CUP XC
COURSE REALLY IS

In association with



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Slippery trails
curve through a
primal wilderness

than just dive straight into it, we decide to warm up on the red route to get our heart rates into the appropriate zone. Whatever that means.

INTO THE RED

Depending on your riding style you'll either find Dalby's red route a constant pleasure or a constant frustration. There isn't a split between the climbs and the descents, no winch and plummet, no point where it's obvious you have to raise or lower your saddle. Instead, it's a constant dripfeed of singletrack that works its way up and down. You really have to stay on the power and pump every corner to keep your speed up as, riding it blind, you have no idea if you're about to be dealt a sharp climb or steep drop after the next turn. Momentum is your friend and you have to be careful not to lose it. My left thumb is getting a real workout on my dropper lever, permanently hovering over it ready to lower or raise the saddle, while my right thumb works the gears non-stop.

Mentally, the red trail is exhausting, and I love it. Dan is less sure. Dan likes his climbs to be climbs and descents to be descents, and the stuff in-between is just filler. The endless unpredictability of the trail messes with his head. Being summer, the dense foliage limits vision to the next corner, scuppering any planning ahead, forcing us to keep our reactions sharp.

A lot of trail centres can feel quite artificial, which is understandable because that's exactly what they are. They are built to deliver maximum thrills and to withstand the tread of a million tyres. Dalby, however, feels mainly natural, more like something you'd find in the wild than a trail that's been built. Part of that is down to the prevalence of sand, rather than the usual trail centre aggregate, giving the impression you're following a deer track or that someone has cleared the brushwood to the side to make a trail. The ferns and overgrown brambles that lash at your arms as you speed along just add to that natural feeling.

While the trails have a heap of character they have pretty limited views. The lack of any great elevation and the dense woodland mean that you won't be seeing much of the North York Moors landscape — but it does mean you're more likely to focus your attention on what's happening in front of you.

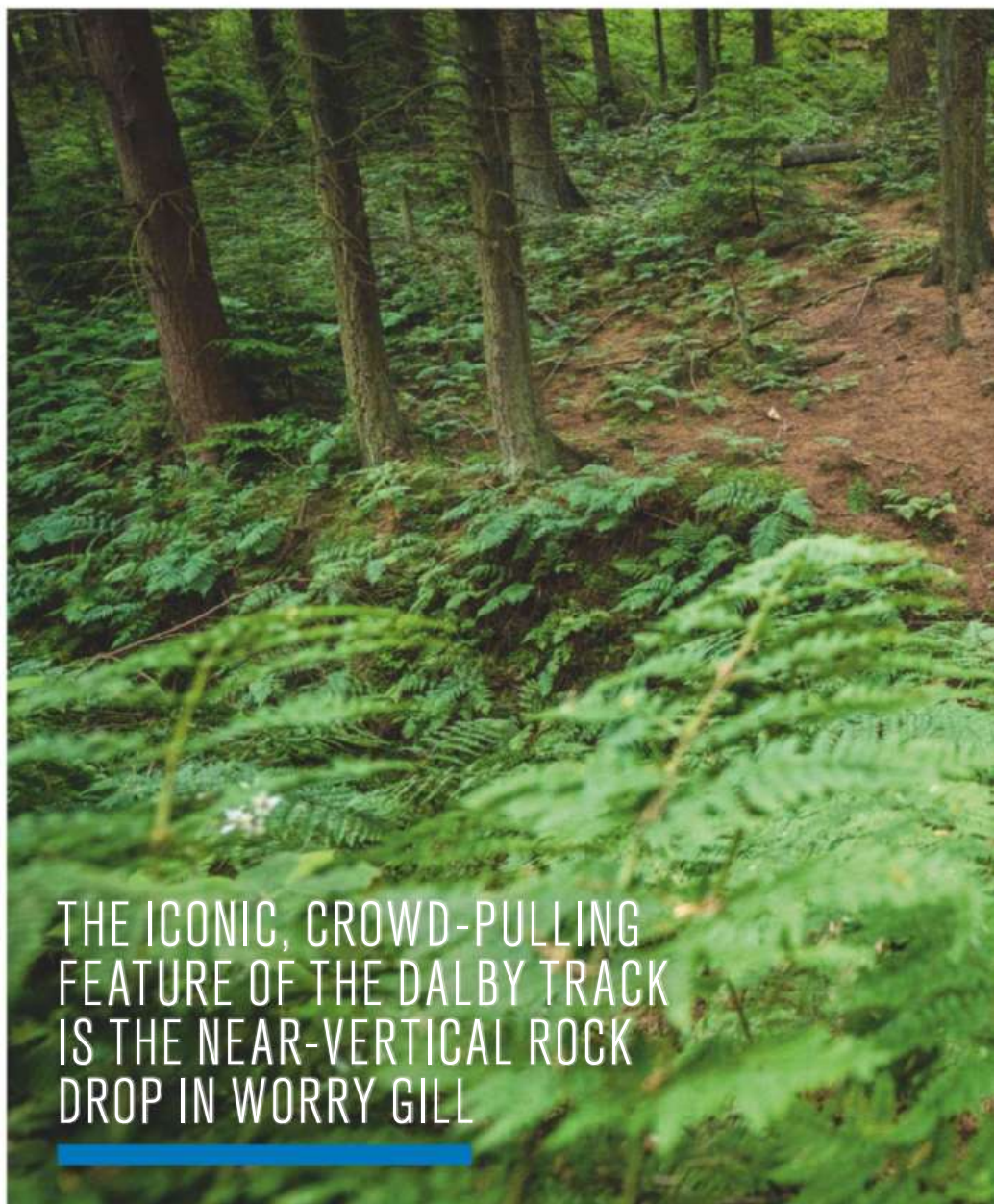
Having worn our legs and thumbs out on the singletrack, it's a relief to come across the oasis that is the freeride park. A section of North Shore woodwork delivers us to the start of the jump area and pump track. All manner of riders, from kids on balance bikes to those old enough to know better, are having a stab at getting air off the jumps, then getting a bit more height and doing it while keeping their tongues in their mouths.

A few close shaves and dodgy landings later, it's time to take on the reason we'd come to Dalby: the World Cup course itself.

THE MAIN EVENT

The black trail has been modified slightly from the original World Cup race course, but enough of the main features have been left to allow you to put yourself in the racers' disco slippers to see how you might compare with the world's fastest.

Being honest, I'm not a racer — I'm not even particularly competitive when it comes to riding my bike — but there's something about riding with



another person on what you know is a race track that changes everything. You try a bit harder, the lactic acid burns in your legs and the horrible taste of blood rises to the back of your throat.

Click-click... the sound of pedals being clipped into and we're off. It's not a race but there's no doubt about it: we're racing.

Having watched the World Cup in the flesh back in 2010 I can remember certain sections of the course, but not well enough to use the knowledge to my advantage. I'm concentrating on keeping Dan in sight as we drop into the rocky, stepped descent. I'm riding pretty ragged, the classic novice racer's mistake of trying too hard rather than trying to be smooth, but 140mm of travel and 29in wheels see me through the worst of it and allow me to make up a bit of ground.

We drop into the dark woods, both of us pumping the suspension and eking out as much speed as we can from the trail. A blind switchback corner into a sharp climb and we're both mashing thumbs into our gear levers, the sound of our chains being forced from one end of the block to the other a clear sign of the mechanical torture we're putting our poor bikes through.

I overcompensate, put myself in too low a gear and almost flip off the back of the bike on the climb, only just managing to keep traction through soft pedalling and careful bum placement on my saddle. No sooner have I done all this than it's time to reverse direction and drop again. At trail-riding speeds I found a constantly up-and-down trail quite fun, but at race speed (our version of it, at least) I'm seeing Dan's point of view — this is tough going. Gears are crunched once again and saddles dropped. By now I'm gasping and we've done maybe a fifth of the course.

The iconic feature of the Dalby track, and the one that drew the biggest crowds on race day, is the near-vertical rock drop in Worry Gill. It looks intimidating, and on an XC race bike I'd certainly be a little wary, but on my long-travel trail bike I clatter down it without needing much finesse. Dan jumps off it. I don't think I saw that move at the World Cup, so Dan's one up on the race snakes there.

The ravine that follows is like something out of *Jurassic Park*, lush with green ferns at their summer finest. The recent rain has made the trail slippery here and the puddles mean we've

In association with



Sandy descents look more natural than nurtured



Go pro! Pedal like it's the World Cup

Trail bikes win when it comes to drop-offs

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORLD CUP AT DALBY

Dalby Forest's XC race course was built specifically for the arrival of the World Cup in 2010, and the first race was a resounding success. Over 11,000 visitors attended the race, which finished with the closest finish yet in World Cup XC, when Nino Schurter beat Julien Absalon in a sprint finish. Inna Kalentjeva won the women's event.

The race returned to Dalby the following year, when Absalon again played bridesmaid, this time to Jaroslav Kulhavy. Julie Bresset won the women's edition, and it's clear that the two winners had a taste for riding in the UK — both also won Olympic gold at Hadleigh Park in 2012.

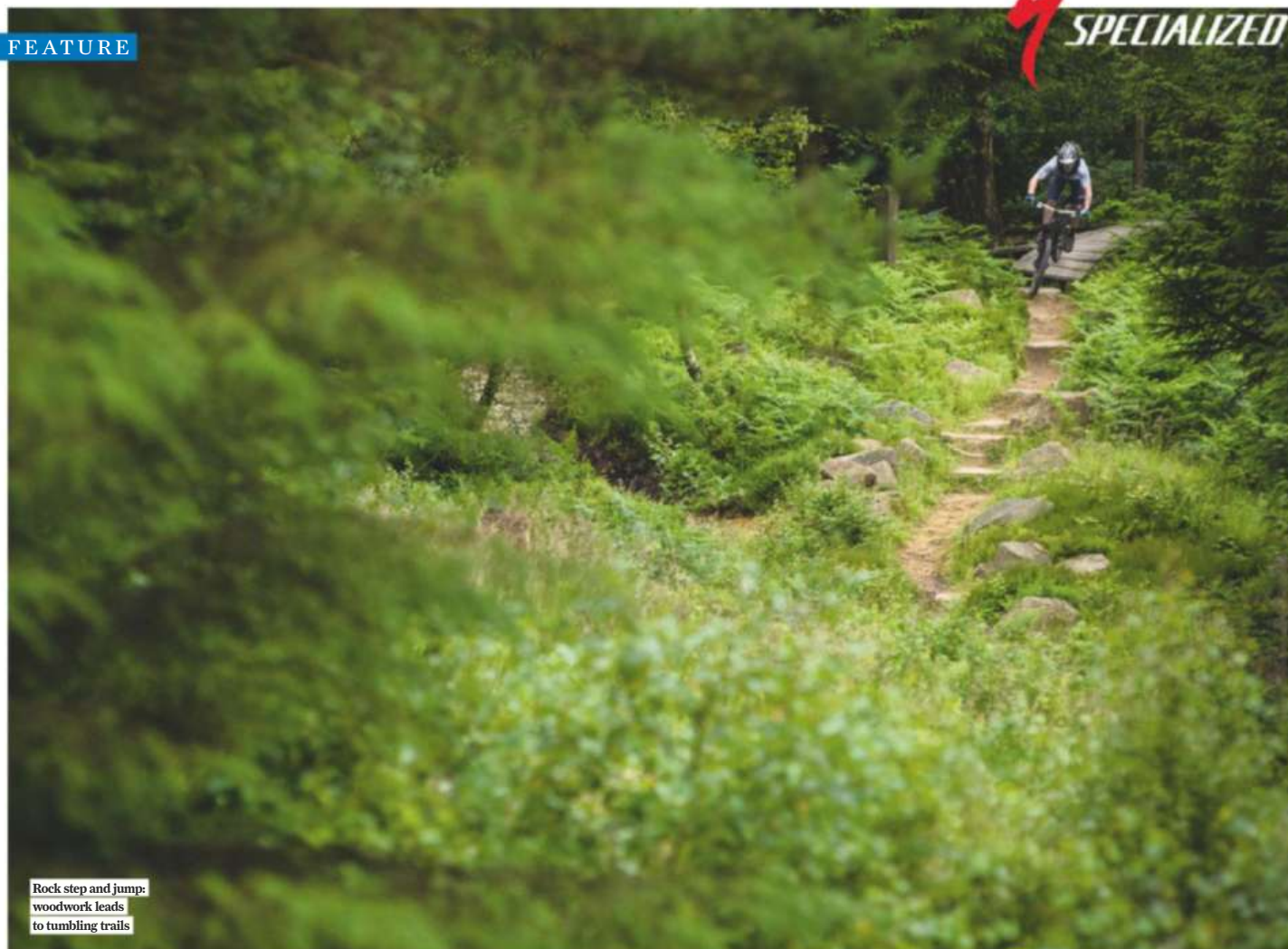


Tight turns suck speed and test bike-handling



Dalby Forest: it's good enough for the stars of XC

FEATURE



Rock step and jump:
woodwork leads
to tumbling trails

soon got grit in our eyes. We hit the bottom of the hill and onto a flat stretch. I'm spent. Absolutely empty. I've managed to burn my reserves in an embarrassingly short amount of time, but there's still one of the few features I can remember from the course to come: the climb back up. I have a feeling Dan has a bit more in his legs than I do, but he doesn't know what's coming up and I reckon I'm a better climber than he is, so let's have it.

The climb in question is pretty much a straight line back up the hill to where we started. Usually I'm a big fan of the most efficient way to the top of a hill — get it over with and enjoy the descent — but in this case I'll make an exception. It just sucks, in a glorious, painful and utterly unrelenting way. I top out with Dan nipping at my heels. I stop. Not very competitive or in the spirit of racing, but it feels like it's a choice between that or vomiting onto my top tube.

There's a brief truce as Dan and I empty sweat out of our helmet padding and get some air back in our lungs. Faces de-reddened, racing recommences. The next section is a rooty, twisty bit of trail down to the fire road, a beautiful example of technical singletrack, and we lap it up. However, Dan seems to lap it up a bit more than I do, and he gets to the bottom ahead of me before putting the power down on the fire road. I click down the block and get out of the saddle, managing to pull the gap between us a bit tighter.

I'm gonna have him. I'm going to do it, and bragging rights will be mine. But that rotter Dan has obviously held a little back as he manages



When your legs
are shot it's time
to 'warm down'

to complete the loop just ahead of me. Bah. I blame the camera bag, as I always do. Red-faced and short of breath, we shake hands. I try to be gracious in defeat.

We've knocked off the black but there's still the rest of the red to finish. This is done at a slightly more sedate speed, because we're warming down. That's what racers do. It's not because we're absolutely knackered, oh no.

We arrive back at the now-empty car park. The cafe is closed so there's no opportunity to have an awards ceremony — instead I offer Dan a victory sausage roll and a swig of Lucozade. We contemplate following up the day's ride with an XC Eliminator race around Pickering town centre but write it off as a stupid idea, much like XC Eliminator.

That kind of stuff gives us XC racers a bad name. 

DALBY FOREST

THE TRAILS

- **GREEN** Ellerburn
Trail — 4km, 1 hour
- **GREEN** Adderstone
Trail — 12.4km, 2 hours
- **RED** (Full) —
34.3km, 4 hours
- **BLACK** 6.4km, 40 mins

PICK OF THE TRAILS

The full red route is a good day out, bolt on the black for a World Cup XC experience of your own

SLEEPING AND EATING

Pickering town is right on the edge of Dalby Forest and has everything you might need including hotels, B&Bs, pubs, restaurants and supermarkets.
welcometopickering.co.uk

FIXING YOUR BIKE

Dalby Bike Barn is based out of Dalby Forest and offers servicing and bike hire.
dalbybikebarn.co.uk

WHAT TO RIDE

The trails at Dalby are mostly smooth and flowing, so a short-travel full-suspension bike or hardtail will be the best tool for the job. The essential component for getting the most out of the trails is a dropper post; if you don't already have one, buy, beg or borrow one.

CONCENTRATE!

Danny Hart



=



www.fenwicks.info

Slovenia

A STATE OF FLOW

Hurting through a disused mine, swooping down breakneck downhills and grinning through Europe's longest 'flow trail', Roo Fowler discovers an Alpine wonderland that truly has it all

Words & photos: Roo Fowler



WATCH THE VIDEO

Watch Olly & Roo's
video diary from
Slovenia – go to
po.st/Flowtrail







With my bike bag in tow, I wander up to the Easyjet check-in desk. "Where are you flying to today?" asks a smiling Tracy behind the desk. I fumble a response: "Er, how do you pronounce Ljubljana?" It's been a long time since A-level geography; I couldn't place Slovenia on a map, name its capital or even guess at what its riding scene could be

like. All I could think of was the Maribor World Cup and a guess that it was somewhere in Eastern Europe. Olly Wilkins and I set out to explore on two wheels exactly what is on offer from this small European country.

Peering out of the windows on the descent into the capital, we see snowy peaks piercing the light cloud cover; so there are mountains at least. Little do we know we've just flown within spitting distance of one of the most ridiculous trails either of us have ever experienced...

Fast forward an hour, and after being collected by Dušan Strucl — better known as Dixie from Bike Nomad — we're driving onto progressively smaller roads... where the hell are we going?


The road finally ends at the head of a valley and we turn onto a track, passing a carved wooden sculpture of a bearded man peering out of the shrubbery, followed by a field full of hemp. Up the track another five minutes and we pass a couple of mountain bikers and turn into Ekohotel Koroš, a former farm that's now home to Bike Nomad.

We stepped out of the van with stiff legs and straight into the quiet bliss of a summer evening in this sleepy area of the Alps. We found several wooden buildings and a courtyard equipped with a swimming pool and spacious bike storage/workshop; a perfect set-up to relax and go riding.

SLOW START

Our first day starts as perfectly as anyone could hope; a solid night's sleep and waking to the sound of distant cowbells transported through the window on a warm breeze. After breakfast we get straight to the riding and hitch a lift in the van to a farm further up the hill, then a short pedal uphill through a meadow following Dixie's son Anej.

The first trail seems to lack flow. It's a bit flat, the odd bush hits us in the face and the trail is littered with the fallout of an Alpine winter. We pop out into a meadow and climb to another block of forest; again the trail is a bit vague. I don't say anything but I glance at Olly and I know he is thinking the same thing; we were hoping for so much more in these perfect surroundings. I suppose that's why we're here; to discover exactly what is on offer, whether for good or not so good, but we'd definitely prefer the former.

We roll on, following wide cart tracks, then dip into another patch of forest. The 


Alpine routes are long, winding and challenging

Travellers' rest: Bike Nomad's home at the Ekohotel Koros







THIS ISN'T THE KIND OF PLACE YOU'D WANT TO GET LOST IN, WITH DARK ABYSSSES BELOW



Rubble rouser: a trail with a difference and a thrill a minute



The light at the end of the tunnel is oncoming traffic



Warning sign: don't say you weren't told

trails become more defined, but before I know it, something's gone wrong. Anej and Olly suffer simultaneous brake failure and they both vanish down the hill out of control, rear wheels spewing twigs and loam in their wake. Actually, there was no brake failure, but instead one of those trails that inspires enthusiasm and confidence; it dares you to let the brakes off and explore the limitations of grip.

Smiles spread between us and I attack the corners, bouncing around the banks to try to keep those two in my sight. We drop into a section of lumpy crests followed immediately by well-

supported turns. I see Olly throwing some crazy shapes as he sucks up the crests and lands into the corners with total commitment to get catapulted into the next. Quite how his bike does not implode is beyond me.

This is more like it!

GOING UNDERGROUND

Day two turns out to be a bit different. We've heard of a locally held race, the Black Hole Enduro, where the last stage is held down a disused lead and zinc mine below Peca mountain; a mine with a network of tunnels that run for over 1,000 kilometres across 20 levels. There is a relatively flat 5km route that follows a set path through the tunnels which is open to mountain bikers, but we've persuaded Anej to give us a preview of the enduro stage to see exactly what the racers ride in this annual event.

Sat outside, we hear a clanking and rumbling emanating from the narrow pitch-black mouth of the mine entrance. A train rumbles out; this is our cue to switch on our lights and jump on the rails.

Actually we don't jump — there's an overhead electricity wire inches above our heads so we're rather more careful. We keep our dropper posts slammed for fear of finding any of the 350 volts inches overhead, and enter the mine. Instantly, the temperature drops from high 20s to less than 10 degrees. We follow Anej, passing countless dark abysses, pedalling past sidings with old ghostly mining trains sleeping in the dark. After a few kilometres we pull off the tracks into a hall lined with benches welded by Anej himself; he had a winter job working at the mine. "At that time



A case of the bends: there are enough to test g-force tolerance

of year it's warmer than outside!" he jokes. More importantly, he knows the tunnels we're standing in, and that seems like a very good thing. This isn't the kind of a place you'd want to get lost.

We edge over rotting wooden boards acting as a bridge over another of those dark abysses disappearing below us. "This is the start of the trail," Anej proclaims, pointing down. Huh? Dropping into the hole is tight, but doable, and as the trail flattens out, all that can be heard is the clatter of loose rocks echoing around the walls. Some pallets form a slalom course down the steep slope and it's a case of locking the back wheel and weaving in and out before a flat sprint takes us through some larger chambers into the truly cavernous finish area.

The riding is loose, and nothing special in its own right, but the experience is unforgettable. To ride in such an environment and learn about the history of the labyrinth that surrounds us is one of the most bizarre but enjoyable experiences two wheels has brought my way. To race this stage with the tunnels echoing with the cheers of spectators and clattering rocks would be something very special.

A noise booms up from somewhere below; we're not alone. It's just the leader of a kayaking tour as they explore some of the flooded lower levels. It's also our signal to get moving; we have a train to miss.

After that experience it doesn't seem like the



Uplifting: and there are berms aplenty

day can get any better, but Anej has a glint in his eye when he talks about the next trail. It's on the mountain above us, on the Austrian side of the border. The mountain is known as Peca in Slovenia, and Petzen in Austria; it plays host to Europe's longest 'flow trail', which sounds too good to be true.

Jumping off the chairlift and following Anej's lead, we roll onto the bright white surface. It's loose at times but the grip is there if you look for it. What follows is dream-like perfection — no braking bumps, just an endless succession of berms, compressions and jumps. The noise of high-speed air fills our ears, along with the buzz of compressed tyres and, every now and then, a ping as Olly 🇨🇭



Trunk road: not much margin for error on this particular route



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finds some grip and roosts it out at my bike as I follow. Whether this is true mountain biking is debatable — but it's pure, simple, undiluted fun. Eventually, after six minutes or so, Anej pulls up. My feet are aching from the g-force and the blood that has been forced into them. My cheeks are aching too; never have I smiled and laughed so much down a trail. I don't want it to end, and despite having just ridden the longest, smoothest, 'flowiest' trail of my life, we're barely a quarter of the way down!

Olly drops in and I follow, with Anej behind. Our guide has deliberately kept us reined in so far, but now Olly is released like a wild animal and I'm scared; this is the kind of trail where you can easily go too fast. The flow is so good that momentum seems to build exponentially. Hit one of those endless, perfectly formed berms at 100 per cent and something's going to give; maybe it'll be your bike, but it feels as if the mountain itself could split in half with the force you slam into the turns. This is mountain

biking that registers on the Richter scale. I find myself having to relearn how to corner, locking my core at the centre of the bike; use a more conventional off-the-back position and the forces try to rip your hands from the bars and pull you off the back of the bike. It would be the biggest 'looping out' moment known to mankind, and I know, because it nearly happened on numerous

occasions. Olly takes a different approach and actually sits down in the corners, which takes the strain off your legs and at the same time prevents you from being thrown off the back. Thankfully there are more than 20 minutes of this, so we have our techniques dialled by the time we eventually reach the end of the trail. Ridiculous is the only word. 🇨🇭



Rocks and a loamy terrain help keep Roo and Olly on their toes

**I'M SCARED... THIS IS THE
KIND OF TRAIL WHERE
YOU CAN GO TOO FAST...
MOUNTAIN BIKING ON
THE RICHTER SCALE**





Real mountain biking: roots and obstacles test on this stretch

CHANGE OF SCENE

Our tour of Slovenia takes us to Hotel Krvavec, where a trail descends 1,000m directly from the entrance. That's an awful lot of vertical first thing in the morning. Today's guide, Aljaz, is no slouch, and it seems like just minutes after we munched on croissants we're hurtling down the mountainside, passing under a sign reading 'Rock 'n' Flow'.

If yesterday's riding forced us to question what real mountain biking was, we've found our answer here. It's an amazing consistency of loamy dirt, rocks and roots on an endless downward gradient. From behind the bars, it's mouth-wateringly good; our tyres seem never have 100 per cent traction but neither do they ever wash out beneath us. With Aljaz and Olly behind me, I feel like I've boarded a runaway freight train. The intensity is almost overwhelming — technical riding at high speed.

The trails keeps changing; sometimes there are steep corners, sometimes short techy chutes, a bit of pine forest then some deciduous trees, a man-made jump and plenty of natural gaps. And there's so much of it. Eventually, over 20 minutes later, we reach the bottom with eyes on stalks and the aroma of burning from our brakes (or maybe it's our forearms).

SPEED FREAKS

Our last day in Slovenia starts in the Bohinj region, known for stunning scenery that looks more like Norwegian fjords than the Alps. We take two lifts up to check out the bike park at Vogel — only one trail right now but with big plans for expansion — and then further down the valley to the chairlift at Soriška Planina. Here we gain about 1,000m of vertical, taking us to an Alpine ridge where we follow our guides Miha and Grega for half an hour until reaching some fortifications left over from World War One.

This is our turning point and we head back down. At first it's winding singletrack with a fair amount of exposure and huge views to the right. As we descend into greenery, the speed increases and we dart in and out of the sunlight and trees. Once into the forest proper, the trail turns into a wide switchback track where the rough ground takes total concentration to ride fast. And it *is* fast! Trees flash past in an ever-increasing blur as we

WE DESCEND 1,000M FROM THE OFF – THAT'S AN AWFUL LOT OF VERTICAL FIRST THING




Pressure drop: there is only way to go from here. Don't look down

hang off the back of our bikes and aim anywhere but towards trunks.

It's a different style from anything we've ridden so far, but it's no less fun. We've all got slightly guilty childish grins on our faces as we enjoy the simple pleasure of the wind rush, speed and the challenge of trying to out-brake the guy in front going into the next switchback. The trail ends and we stop at a cafe where we gulp down a local grapefruit beer, before catching a train underneath the ridge back to the start.

Four days and four totally different riding experiences. At each spot the locals said they could show us so much more if only we were here for longer. Next time we will be.

■ A huge thanks to Dixie and Anej from bikenomad.com as well as Grega and Maja from hikeandbike.si for their enthusiasm and expertise. 

FACTFILE

■ Easyjet flies once a day direct to Ljubljana from London Stansted. The trails at Krvavec are only a matter of kilometres from the airport.

■ Ekohotel Koroš (bikenomad.com) is a great place to stay on your trip. It's run by mountain bikers so has everything you could need, including great riding, a workshop/bike store and even a pool and sauna.

■ Check slovenia.info for more information on visiting the country.

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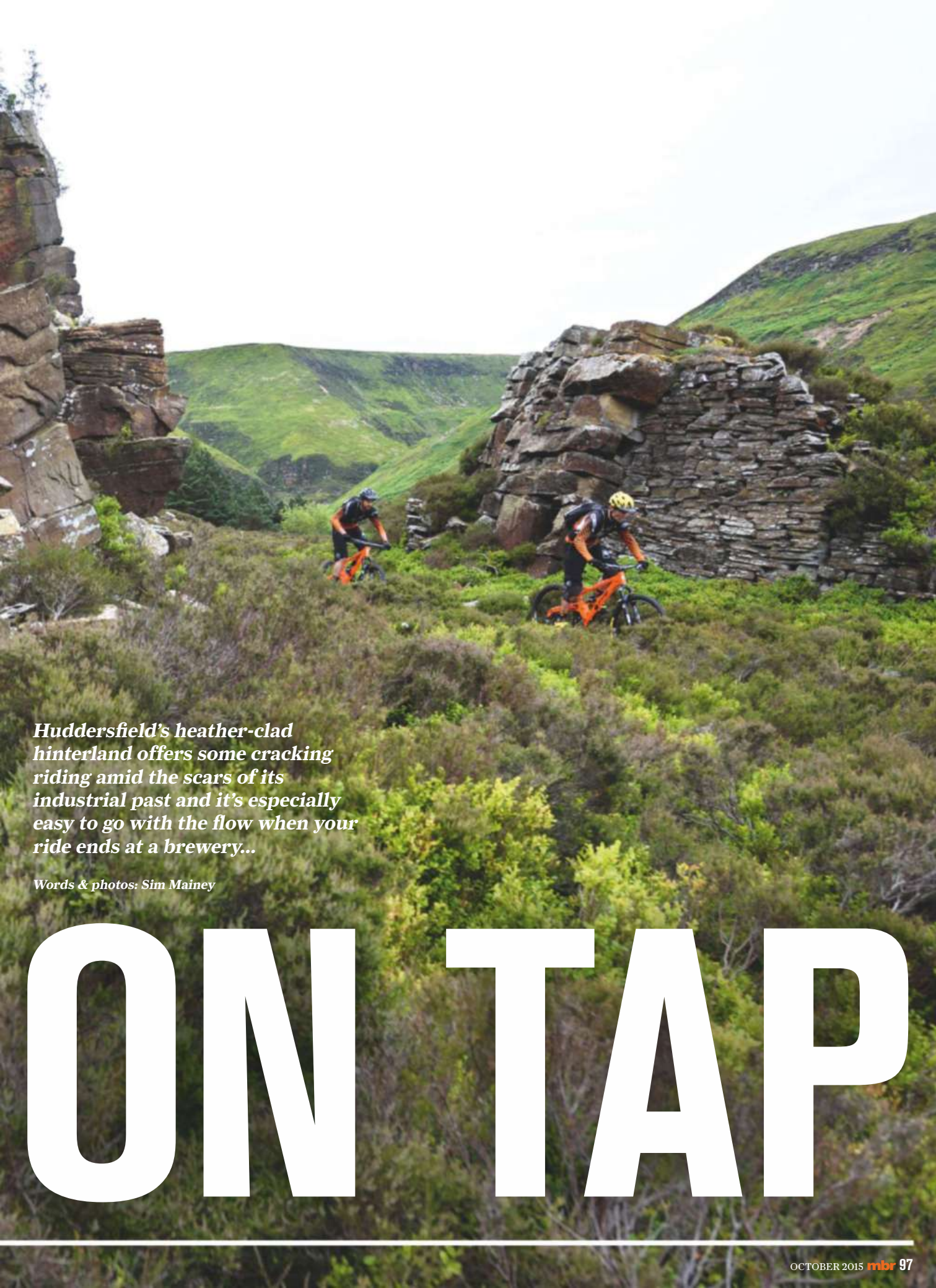


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FEATURE

TRAILS

A full-page photograph of two mountain bikers riding through a heather-clad landscape. The bikers are wearing orange and black gear. In the background, there are large stone ruins and green hills under a cloudy sky.

Huddersfield's heather-clad hinterland offers some cracking riding amid the scars of its industrial past and it's especially easy to go with the flow when your ride ends at a brewery...

Words & photos: Sim Mainey

ON TAP



Good head for business: you can't fault Rich's work-life balance

According to the Campaign For Real Ale's 2015 *Good Beer Guide*, West Yorkshire has more breweries — 60, in fact — than any other county in the UK.

According to me, West Yorkshire also has some of the best riding in the UK, and, like some of the breweries, I haven't even sampled all of it yet. There's a strong connection between beer and

bikes round these parts.

Take my mate Rich, for example. Like a boy-done-good Huddersfield Roy of the Rovers, he combines a day-job in a brewery with hobby as a pretty handy mountain biker. I've known Rich for ages — we have a lot of mutual riding friends as well as a joint appreciation for all things bike and beer-related.

Despite all this, we've never quite got round to going for a ride together. We've made plans but all those things we all know too well — work, home stuff, weather, lame excuses — have always come between us and a ride.

To be fair, Rich has been pretty busy recently. The brewery where he works, Magic Rock, has just opened a tap room, and Rich has been making sure it all looks as it should. And while he's been working, I've been planning. I've never ridden any of the trails around Huddersfield, despite living just 10 miles away — six lanes of traffic known as the M62 have acted as an all-too-effective barrier. But a tap room? At the end of some new trails I've never ridden? With beers I've never drunk?

A phone call later and it was sorted: we'd organised a piss-up in a brewery. With a bike ride thrown in for good measure.

CODE ORANGE

Through some clever wangling, Rich has managed to put together a race team which Magic Rock sponsors. The team consists of Rich and a mutual friend, Seb. Pro-Am bike racers, Pro-Pro beer



Orange Bikes: made in Halifax, ridden around Huddersfield

drinkers. Keeping a West Yorkshire connection, the team is supported by Halifax-based Orange Bikes, so when I meet up with Rich and Seb for our tour of Huddersfield it's not too surprising to see them in their Magic Rock/Orange team kit, and on matching bikes. Rich has a big ride planned — one that will show me some more of West Yorkshire's finest trails and help us work up a thirst for trying some of its finest beers, too. We head off up a cobbled ginzel, 800mm bars gently scraping on the gritstone walls either side.


Huddersfield sits on the northern edge of the Peak District. One of the powerhouses of the industrial north, it has its fair share of Victorian civil engineering feats, viaducts, canals and reservoirs. Grand halls and vast mill buildings seem to be dropped into the corner of every valley. It also has a lot of trails; once used to connect town to town, moorland to factory and homes to work, they now serve as a way to escape urban life.

After a steady climb we cut through the bracken at the side of the road and up a steep bank into woodland. We pick up a line of dirt through the trees that turns into a fully-formed trail — a very fast fully-formed trail. There's a slight downhill tilt but it encourages you to pedal where you can, weaving past overgrown bushes and trees, hopping over exposed roots and dog eggs. We go from wood to field and back into the woods.

The key to a good mountain bike route is connections, linking the end of one great piece



Steep valley high: giving in to a well-earned gravity rush



**WE HEAD OFF UP A
COBBLED GINNEL,
800MM BARS GENTLY
SCRAPING ON THE
GRITSTONE WALLS
EITHER SIDE**

of trail to the beginning of another with minimal height loss on the road, keeping the quality high and the filler to a minimum. Rich nips through a hole in a wire fence and we follow. In-between the ruins of old brick out-houses and almost obscured by thick shrubs and gangly weeds, it's possible to make out a grand old building. Once an asylum, it's long abandoned, with only a family of foxes as residents now. The grounds are heavily wooded, and various tracks and jumps have been built by local riders. Well-raked lines spread in all directions; the ground is dry and we spend a good while drifting through corners and popping off jumps. It'd be easy to stay here all day but we need to keep moving — there's plenty more to see.

MOOR THE MERRIER

From dense green woods we move on to a more typical Yorkshire landscape: moorland. Part of the reason West Yorkshire does well for brewing is its water — both the quantity and the quality. Most of it can be found on the moors, either in the peaty ground itself or in the reservoirs that are dotted across the landscape, slowly working its way down to the waterways in the valleys below.

Today, thankfully, most of it is in the reservoirs rather than the moors, and our tyres make the low rumbling noise that comes with riding over sun-baked peat. And then, cresting the top of the moor, we're confronted by a view that looks more Scottish than Yorkshire: a deep valley, its sides like walls of grass dotted with patches of heather. The trail along its flank is hard to make out, overgrown from lack of use. As we descend we pass through a disused quarry; at some point this would have been a well-used track with men and carts going up and down, delivering the raw ingredients to build the factories and mill houses.

Quarries, reservoirs, mills, canals, pack-horse trails — industry has certainly had its way with this part of the world, and despite nature doing a good job of starting to reclaim what is rightfully hers, man has definitely and irreversibly made his mark on this landscape. Mountain bikers have benefitted from this industrial past — trade routes are now leisure routes, and places of graft are now areas of play. It baffles me when mountain bikers get shouted at for damaging the trails we ride; the countryside was damaged a long time before mountain bikes were invented, and any impact we make is nothing compared to the carnage industry (past or present) has created. I prefer it that mountain bikers are keeping some of that industrial heritage alive, keeping the paths and routes used, custodians of the old, forgotten ways.

We've been riding a while now, and legs and stomachs are feeling empty. Rich guides us to a pub with a small shop annexed off to one side. Inside it sells a selection of pies, drinks, fruit and veg, as well as other essentials, like wrapping paper and a crate full of C90 cassette tapes. I resist buying *Chariots Of Fire* and go for a corned beef hash pasty with peas and gravy. Finishing it, I have a feeling I might be a bit slower for the rest of the ride.

As the stodge is slowly spread around my body on the brutally sharp climb that immediately follows lunch, there's more than a few occasions where I experience what can only be described as pasty regret. Luckily I'm not the only one. We decide we could do with something to pep us up so Rich decides on a bit of 'live editing' to our route,



Wheels of industry: bikers get busy on the trade routes of the past



Luddite Vegan? This pub shop's for you



Mossy boulders offer the chance to grab some air

targeting a decent coffee to bring us out of our carb-comas.

WHAT THEY DID FOR US

While we struggle to find or follow some of the trails left by the Victorians, the roads left by the Romans are still in active use today, almost 2,000 years after they were built. The long, straight track we're riding up is undoubtedly Roman, the most efficient way of connecting point A to B with scant regard for any obstacles in the way. This does make for a reasonably easy way to the top of the hill and for that I'm grateful as we once again head for the horizon of the moor... but it does lack some of the panache of the Industrial age. With their stone flags laid out across the boggy moorland, insane flights of steps down valley sides and winding tracks, the Victorians give a lot of mountain bike trail-builders a run for their money. 🍷



THE ROADS LEFT BY THE ROMANS ARE STILL IN USE, ALMOST 2,000 YEARS AFTER THEY WERE BUILT



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Huddersfield heights:
heading back down to
beer and civilisation

Skirting the inevitable glassy reservoir at the top of the hill, the rain sets in. That coffee would be very much appreciated about now — but Rich reveals that the descent to our caffeine buzz is made of two sections. The first half he knows. The second is apparently a 'work in progress'. Sounds interesting.

Heather rips at my shins as we drop off the hill, the trail twisting and turning past cast-iron air ducts that jut out of the ground, designed to help the water flow from the top of the hill to the bottom. Rich takes an unplanned exit over the bars and into a thankfully forgiving clump of reeds. The trail is so vague that it's hard to see what's going on under the front wheel, and we proceed with caution, weight further back on the bike than normal. We drop off the moor and onto the road, Rich looking for the mystery second part of the trail.

I'LL DRINK TO THAT

Things start well, a trail covered by long grass between drystone walls, but soon it becomes a nettle-covered stream of slurry. Being simultaneously sprayed with liquid cow muck and stung is not what we were expecting, but we can't say we weren't warned; trail exploration doesn't come with a guarantee.

Dark Woods Coffee sits on the River Colne outside Huddersfield. More than just a cafe, they roast their own beans in a fantastic old wool mill — another example of the past's reappropriation. Rich has been working with Dark Woods on a new beer, which has involved selflessly taste-testing multiple beers and coffees to see what will work. We turn up covered in crap but are welcomed in and presented with the kind of coffee that's worth riding through shit for. Which is just as well really, as that's exactly what we've done.




When you work for
Magic Rock, drinking
is all in a day's work

Time is ticking on, and there are a few more miles to go, so we leave the warmth of the coffee machine and head outside. It's still raining. We form an unlikely chain gang along the canal, three quite tired mountain bikers who would really rather like a beer about now.

Towpath leads to tarmac, and we navigate our way through the Friday traffic that's starting to build up. Bikes are thrown over a low wall and into what looks like wasteland, the in-between land on the fringe of society that the town no longer wants but the countryside hasn't quite claimed back yet. We whip through the narrow trail, grass and brambles ripping at our arms, and end up on an escarpment looking down onto Huddersfield. Gritstone factories sit alongside large corrugated metal-box warehouses, old and new squeezed into

the bottom of the busy valley. We wrestle our way past a rhododendron bush and descend through what must once have been a quarry. Fringe land being used by those with fringe interests, like mountain bikers.

Magic Rock's tap room is, thankfully, bike-friendly, so there aren't too many odd looks thrown our way as we wheel our mud-covered steeds past the well-dressed customers enjoying a Friday night out. A couple of pints and some Yorkshire tapas later (pork scratchings, nuts and crisps, tha' know) and we reflect on all the places we've ridden that day. If you ride in West Yorkshire you're indebted to the Industrial Revolution for some incredible trails and it does make you wonder, what would they have made of the way we use them today...? 

ALTURA

ALWAYS ATTACK

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Q&A

This month: the benefits of flat pedals, how to change a spoke and fix a leaky fork

YOUR EXPERT

AL VINES
Tech boffin at i-ride. Likes nothing more than a mechanical challenge, Al bleeds brake fluid, speaks spoke and talks Nm.



THE BIG QUESTION

I want to buy some flat pedals, what should I look for?

Q I've ridden clipped-in pretty much ever since I started mountain biking, but some of my mates keep harping on about how good flat pedals are, can you talk me through the pros and cons?

Mick Donohue, email

A Well Mick, your mates are right, flat pedals are awesome in many ways. At times you may have found that your clipless pedals clog in the mud, release unexpectedly, give you knee pain, scare you in techy situations, refuse

to engage, or disengage, need extra maintenance, and the shoes get you some odd looks in the pub. None of this happens with flat pedals.

What you will miss out on, though, is efficiency. Even flat-pedal specific shoes won't offer the stiffness and tenacity of a dedicated clipless pedal, and being clipped to the pedal also means you can deliver power in the entire pedal stroke. If absolute efficiency is the be-all-and-end-all for you, then flats probably aren't the best choice. But if you value having fun, and getting

a little loose out on the trail, you should definitely give them a try. Even if you don't make the swap forever, flat pedals teach you how to control the bike properly — for instance if you can't bunny hop a bike without being clipped in, then you're doing it all wrong.

Proper sticky-soled shoes and quality platforms will enhance the experience no end, but there's no reason why you can't take a foray into the world of the flat pedal wearing your regular trainers and a pair of sub-£20 pedals.

Flat pedals teach you more bike control over clipless

FIRST TIME FLATS AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR

PEDAL SIZE

In recent times mtb pedals have grown considerably in terms of size and platform while also getting thinner in profile. Thin pedals are great; they offer a more stable platform as you're less likely to roll the pedal with your foot (causing you to slip), there's more ground clearance, which reduces pedal strikes, and you can also run your seat lower, meaning you can rail those corners a little harder. Beware of going too big though. Anything wider than your shoe is pointless, and only goes to increase the chance of hooking your pedal up on part of the trail, particularly when cornering. Pedals can also be too thin. Wafer-thin pedals have been known to flex, and they usually have smaller, less-durable bearings.



SHOES

You can use trainers, but a flat-pedal specific shoe, with a super-tacky rubber outsole, stiffer sole and reinforced toe and heel areas to keep your tootsies safe, makes a huge difference. Some shoes deliver more grip than others, and Five Ten is regarded as making the grippiest out there. Some Five Ten shoes feature a tread-less section of sole, which gives maximum grip while enabling the foot to be positioned more easily. As with many things, it's a case of trying to see what works best for you — some riders like to be totally locked in, others prefer a bit of foot movement.



Get more grip by altering your pins

PEDAL PINS

Longer pins in your pedals increase grip but they also increase the amount of damage they will inflict if you are unfortunate enough to slip a foot. Some pedals use proprietary pins, so you have to get the ones supplied by the manufacturer, but there may be a longer option, such as DMR and Gussets 'Terror' and 'XL' pins.

If the pedal is fitted with a standard grub screw, rather than a machined pin, you can call up your local nut and bolt emporium and buy whatever length you require/dare.

HOW TO PLACE & SET UP THE PINS IN YOUR PEDALS

You can optimise the grip your pedal offers by playing with the length, position and number of pins in your pedals. Here's how.



01 For most riders a concave cross-section platform is desirable in terms of feel and grip. Try running shorter pins in the middle of the pedal (if it's an option) with longer ones front and back. Some riders run a shorter pin (or none at all) at the back of the pedal in the centre (see pic), as this is the one that tends to cause you the most damage if you slip.



02 Pins can be fitted with or without washers to change their length.



03 DMR's highly regarded Vault pedal is slim and has a large platform. The pins in this pedal can be screwed in from either side to provide a long pin or shorter stud. If you mash the Allen head on a rock, spanner flats are provided to aid removal.



04 When fitting pedal pins, add a drop of Loctite 243 to the threads to prevent them seizing solid and/or working loose.

AXLES

Many pedals come with the option of different axles. For instance a titanium axle might be available (usually as a big bucks upgrade); these will drop a stack of weight but usually have a rider weight limit. Another possible axle option is the size of the threads. Unless you're riding a kid's bike or a BMX with a one-piece crank, don't buy 1/2in pedals, you need 9/16in.

Axle options can vary



QUICK FIXES

Scavenge a valve core from an inner tube to mend a leaking fork



LEAKY FORK

Q My Fox fork is leaking air and it seems to be the valve; I used my mate's old gritty pump and I think it knackered it! I don't have time to get a new top cap from Mojo before a trip I've booked, is there anything I can do?

Edward Short, email

A If it's just the valve, you don't need a whole new top cap. Test it by inflating the fork, spitting on your finger and wiping it over the top of the valve to create a film. If it pops straight away then the chances are it's the valve core. Start by tightening it, because it may just be loose. Then, if this doesn't work, you can buy spares easily from an auto factors, or if you have an old Schrader tube you can pinch the valve core from that. You'll need a valve core tool to unscrew it (as shown) and these are available from auto factors too.

WARRANTY CLAIM

Q I bought a new bike 11 months ago and the bearings in the rear hub are feeling rough already. Do you reckon I can get these replaced under warranty?

Kelly, email

A In a word, no. Bearings are wear and tear items, and some manufacturers offer no warranty on them at all. Eleven months of British mountain biking isn't to be sniffed at, and depending on your maintenance regime, it might not actually be such a short lifespan. Depending on the model of hub, you might be able to swap out the bearings for a few quid. If the wheels are cheap, and this doesn't seem to be an option, then this could be

(bank balance depending) an ideal time for an upgrade.

SNAPPED SPOKE

Q One of my spokes has broken and I'm due to go away with my bike. I've managed to get a spare one from the manufacturer but my local shop is too busy to fit it right away. How hard is it to do it myself?

Simon Elliot, email

A Have you tried tempting the mechanic with biscuits or beer? If they are a teetotal weight-watcher, I'm sure you'll be able to complete the job yourself with a modicum of tools and skills. As long as your wheel is fairly conventional, and not too out of shape, it shouldn't be too hard to get a reasonable result. If the spoke has broken inside the nipple, you will need to replace that too.

Remove the tyre, tube and rim tape to access the nipples. In order to fit the spoke into place you might need to remove the cassette, disc rotor or even both of them.

Weave the spoke into place so that it matches the pattern of your wheel (most wheels are three cross) and tighten the nipple onto it until the tension (give the spokes a squeeze) is similar to its neighbours. Refit what you removed and you should have a wheel that, while not entirely true, should work well enough.



Tighten the new spoke into place

Crank Brothers pedals service

Keep Crank Brothers pedals spinning smoothly with our annual service

Let's face it, pedals have a hard life. They get a good kicking from both rider and trail, yet we expect them to work perfectly all the time. You can improve the reliability by paying them some attention once in a while. High-end models from Crank Brothers use a simple cartridge bearing and bush, or needle bearing, to keep them spinning, and it's not too hard to rejuvenate them. Tool-wise they're not too demanding either; Crank Brothers even supplies a punch with the rebuild kit to remove the bush or needle bearing, just make sure you buy the right kit. Level 1 and 2 pedal rebuild kits cost £12.99 (bush), and if you've got level 3 pedals, or you've turned it up to the big pimping level 11 pedals, the kit will cost you £14.99 (needle bearing), all from extrauk.co.uk.

We recommend you do this service annually; don't wait until they're totally haggard.

NEED TO KNOW

- **TIME TAKEN**
40mins
- **SKILL LEVEL**
Moderate
- **MONEY SAVED**
Around £30
- **GOT INTO TROUBLE?**

There's not a lot that can go wrong here. Take a picture, or video, with your phone when dismantling and you won't go far wrong.

GET MORE

Watch a video tutorial by visiting po.st/CrankBros

YOUR EXPERT

AL VINES
Tech boffin at i-ride. Relishing nothing more than a mechanical challenge, Al bleeds brake fluid, speaks spoke and talks Nm.



TOOLS FOR THE JOB

- Hammer, grease, paper towel or rags, Loctite 243 (blue), T25 Torx key, 8mm socket and driver, 8mm Allen key, small flat-bladed screwdriver, large flat-bladed screwdriver, re-build kit

TOP TIP

Upon removing the axle, note the orientation of the double-lipped seal



- 01** Remove the end cap using a large flat-bladed screwdriver. Hold the axle with the 8mm Allen key while undoing the recessed 8mm nut as shown. Remove the axle and seal.



- 02** Undo the two Torx bolts that hold the wings in place. Pull the wings free from the pedal body.



- 03** Poke out the bearing, and carefully lever out the top hat-shaped bushes and O-rings from both of the wings with a small flat-bladed screwdriver. Note the orientation of the bushes and O-rings.



WARNING

Be careful not to slip and stab yourself when removing/fitting the end cap or when levering out seals or bushes. A work bench, or vice with soft jaws, helps here



- 04** Using a hammer and the supplied punch, drift out the old bushing/needle bearing from the inboard wing. Clean all parts.



05 Fit the new bushing/needle bearing into the inboard wing. Tap it into place until it is seated, using a socket that's fractionally smaller than the outside diameter of the bearing. A 9mm seems to work well.

TOP TIP

When fitting the bushing/needle bearing ensure it is fully inserted and butted up against its seat — you won't need to hit it hard!

06 Lightly grease the O-rings and top hat bushes. Fit the O-ring first and then the bush. These can be pressed into place by hand. If you can't, give them a gentle tap with a soft faced mallet (the tall bush can be tricky). Do this for both wings ensuring that you fit the correct height bush to the correct wing.

TOP TIP

Ensure the tall bush goes into the inboard wing and that the shorter bush goes into the outboard wing



07 Grease the bush to keep it running smoothly.

08 Re-fit the wings onto the body. Make sure the longest part of the tube protruding from the body goes into the inboard wing.



09 Re-fit the bolts (8Nm), re-applying Loctite 243 as necessary.

10 Grease the axle and fit the new double-lipped seal making sure it is correctly orientated.



11 Drop the new cartridge bearing into the outboard side of the pedal and fit the axle and new Nyloc nut (4Nm) to hold everything together.



12 Fit the new end cap. Repeat for the other pedal.



FROM RACE TO TRAIL

EVERYDAY ENDURO

YOUR COACH

Toby Pantling began his racing in the world of downhill, but with the advent of enduro he has found a style of racing that perfectly reflects the kind of riding he enjoys. With over 10 years' racing experience, he has a wealth of knowledge that has helped him to category wins in races such as the Scottish Enduro series and the Trans Provence.

ABOUT TOBY

Sponsors: Orange, Mojo, TLD
Trail bike: Orange Five
From: Guildford,
Surrey
Age: 31



Ride faster, climb quicker and set your suspension smarter, with our enduro skills guide to regular riding

Whether you consider enduro is simply a format of racing, or a complete style of mountain biking, it remains rooted in the everyday riding that most of us enjoy. Enduro racing is now beginning to mature, and the quest for speed and efficiency that timed competition demands has driven bike and kit design ever onwards. So, what can we learn from racing that can help improve our experience out on the trails? In this two-part series, successful amateur racer Toby Pantling is going to delve into his years of enduro experience and pass on the advice that can transfer from the race track to the trail.

RACE STAGES

Race stages are fast, flat-out and frenetic, but while the intensity may be higher than your average social trail ride, they effectively mirror those crucial descents, where you try to outpace your mates or try to move up the pecking order. There can also be times when you want to show a clean pair of heels to someone who's tried to pass you in a corner, or you're determined to catch the rider in front. It could even be one of those perfect days when you're full of energy, riding great singletrack and just really want to attack the trail ahead. Whatever the motivation, when descending fast, it's the small things that can make the difference and give you the confidence to push your limits. For example, your control inputs to the bike, the accuracy of your suspension settings and tyre choice. Get those things right and you'll have no excuse!



WATCH THE VIDEO

Let Toby show you how it's done — just go to po.st/enduro2

TOBY'S PRO TIPS

- 01** Eliminate as much noise as possible from your bike. Noise is distracting and can make you question whether something is wrong with your bike — not what you want to be doing when riding fast.
- 02** Lock-on grips are great for convenience, but for the ultimate in feel, you can't beat a well-installed pair of soft rubber grips secured with wire.
- 03** Flat pedals naturally help you to ride loose, lean the bike over further, stay off the brakes through technical sections and give a big extra boost of confidence. This is especially true when you're riding a trail for the first time.



Make workshop time part of your pre-ride routine

- 04** Keep on top of servicing your bike. If you don't, you might not notice a slight, gradual deterioration in performance of components, like forks, over time. Service such items regularly, so that the feel stays consistent and you always know where you are.

SETTING SAG

As speed increases, impacts and compressions become faster and harder, so you need to think about how that affects your suspension. If you've never invested time setting up your suspension properly, now is the time to do so. First of all, make sure you're wearing your riding kit. That includes your pack (full of water) and helmet. Get a friend to hold the handlebars, or lean gently against a tree, so you can stand up in the riding position you'd normally adopt when descending. Compress the suspension a few times to free up the seals, let the fork and shock come to rest and push the o-rings against the seals without changing the attitude of the bike. Gently dismount without affecting the position of the o-rings. Check the sag — aim for around 30 per cent rear and 20 per cent front and adjust the air pressure as necessary. You can make a note of the pressures and store them in your phone for easy reference. Now, check your rebound. This is related to the air pressure, and weight of the rider, so higher pressures will need more rebound damping. Start by adding just enough that you can compress the fork (or shock), then just about get the wheel off the ground before the fork fully extends.



Digi-gauges make for exact pressures



Sag setting: adopt your downhill body position



Attack the trail like you're up against the clock



Grab grip at the front wheel with a wide-spaced tread

TYRE CHOICE

Tyre choice can be critical in a racing situation, but it is also important for general trail riding. The more grip you generate, the more confidence you'll have and the more you can enjoy the ride. Tread patterns are personal preference, but we'd aim for a compound of around 50-60a, with a single ply or reinforced sidewall. Tyre widths also vary, even between tyres nominally marked with the same dimensions, but we'd recommend a 2.2in-2.4in with a more widely spaced tread on the front compared to the rear. If you want extra grip, put a tackier tyre on the front — something closer to a 40a — or try a double or triple compound tyre. As for pressures, we have been running as low as 24psi with success, but 30psi would be a good starting point depending on tyre size, casing, rim width, terrain and rider weight.

TECHNIQUE



Being buzzed?
Relax and ride
your own trail

PRESSURE RELEASE

Too much pressure often leads to mistakes. In racing, it's not uncommon for a rider behind to use this to his or her advantage, purposely intimidating the person in front into making a mistake. If you've got an overly aggressive mate, who always dives into a trail behind you and tries to buzz your wheel all the way down, imagine there's a rider ahead of you and you're trying to catch them. Also keep in mind that it's actually much more difficult to follow someone closely as your vision down the trail is blocked and you have less time to react to obstacles.



Function beats
fashion when it
comes to eyewear

VISION

As much as we all love a bit of fresh loam, it's better under our wheels than in our eyes. Whether racing or just riding, clear vision is everything. Goggles are ridiculed, but they offer great protection from debris and stop your eyes watering on cold descents in the winter. Glasses are more aesthetically acceptable, and cooler on hot days, but they don't offer quite as much coverage.



Ride easy: flow
round corners and
keep your speed

KEEP THE FLOW

The word flow is used frequently in the world of mountain biking, and with good reason. There is something so enjoyable about effortlessly cruising down a trail without having to pedal or brake. It's not just the trail that generates flow though; the way you ride plays as big a part. Dull trails can suddenly become fun and challenging once you introduce the speed of racing.

Imagine a short ascent before a descent on a trail; don't shift into an easy gear and winch

slowly up it. Instead, use your momentum from the previous section of trail to carry you up. This might mean pedalling hard on the approach, and easing off on the climb. It's all about timing your effort for maximum gain. It's not all about pedalling either. Carrying speed on descents, climbs or flat sections can also be done through smooth line choice, pumping and even tucking down out of the wind.



Pace yourself or
you'll end up a
blurry-eye wreck

100 PER CENT IS TOO MUCH

Enduro racing doesn't always mean riding at 100 per cent, there are times when it's faster to go slower. Crank up a climb just before a steep descent at maximum effort, and you'll be a wobbling, slobbering blurry-eyed wreck; not ideal for dodging trees at high speed! Judging your effort is a skill all top enduro racers have developed, but it takes practice and experience. While out riding have a play; go hard up the climbs but back off a touch near the top to get a few deep breaths in ready to attack the descent.

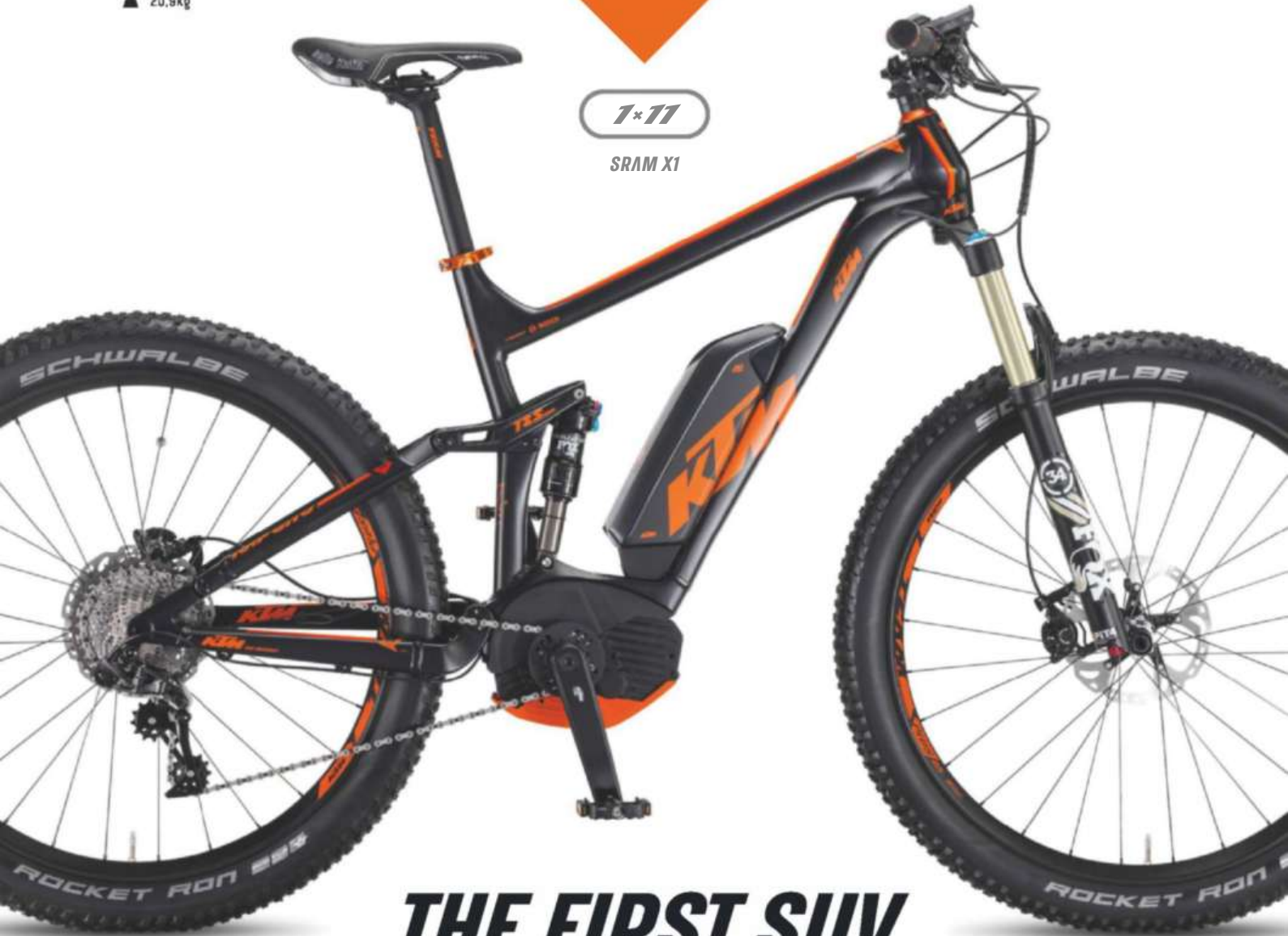
MACINA KAPHO

27+ X1 11 CX5

-  BOSCH PERFORMANCE CX 75 Nm
-  Power Pack 13,9 Ah - 500Wh
-  Bosch Intuvia LCD Display GPS
-  Fox 34 Float 27.5 plus
-  Sram X1 RD 1x11
-  20,9kg

1x11

SRAM X1



THE FIRST SUV ON TWO WHEELS

Based on the motto "exceed limits" KTM enters the stage of wheel size 27+. Even though the Macina Kapoho 27+ can be classified as a Trailbike, the target group is surprisingly large. The 3" thick tires with low air pressure are able to build up much more grip in rough terrain. Due to this technology, challenging passages can now be mastered playfully, this is why the target group is so big. In addition the enormous air volume enables a comfortable ride and obstacles are noticeably better absorbed. The basis for the 130/125mm chassis is a proven aluminum frame with 3D Rocker. The Macina Kapoho 27+ is electrically powered by the NEW Bosch CX system that scores with increased torque, this ensures powerful propulsion.

GO AND DISCOVER THE KAPOHO PLUS-PLUS EFFECT!

KTM
BIKE INDUSTRIES

KTM-BIKES.AT

Tested

PRAXIS WORKS WIDE RANGE CASSETTE

£99.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 321g • range: 11-40t • contact: upgradebikes.co.uk

If you're running a 1x10 drivetrain the only way to increase your gear range is to fit one of those oversized range-extender cogs. But the problem with that is you invariably have to ditch one of the smaller sprockets, and this can leave a bit of a gap in the gearing.

Praxis Works' new 10-speed cassette is a dedicated wide-range design with an 11-40t ratio (11-13-15-17-19-21-24-28-34-40) and more regular jumps between sprockets. It doesn't have the dinner-plate 42t you get with an 11-speed system, such as Shimano XT or SRAM XX1, but the spread of gears was just about right. The transition from gear to gear, as you go up the cassette, feels very even with no great jumps or loss of momentum.

The cassette is built from two materials, with the smaller eight cogs made from stainless steel and the largest two from weight-saving aluminium. All but the smallest two cogs are punched full of holes to remove excess material, so the cassette comes in at a reasonable 321g.

For a penny under £100, it is twice the price of a regular 10-speed Shimano XT cassette, but when you factor in the price of a range-extender cog (typically around £40), the difference is much closer. The Praxis also has the bonus of not needing an extra long B-Tension bolt for the rear derailleur — a prerequisite with most range-extender cogs.

The cassette works with both mid and long-cage 10-speed derailleurs and is a doddle to set up. Once the B-Tension bolt was adjusted to clear the largest sprocket, I was away. Shift quality — even clumsy multi-shifts under load — was as good as anything from either big S, and it's noticeably smoother than any range-extender.

There are two of these cassettes on test at **mbr**, and after four months of hard use, neither one is showing any real signs of wear, although how they'll fare over the harshness of a British winter remains to be seen.

So far I've been very impressed with the Praxis Works cassette; it's durable, shift quality is excellent, and as a means of going wide range, while retaining your current drivetrain, it's easily the best option around.

Ben Smith



The hole story: less metal for light weight

YOUR TESTERS



PAUL BURWELL

Just back from Eurobike. Made up seeing Magura's new electric dropper, not so knocking a table of wine over at Canyon's BBQ



ROB HOYLES

Knocked himself out on a 30ft double, Eddie Kidd style. Still dazed, he bought a round at the pub next evening — result!



MICK KIRKMAN

Three weeks in the Alps: home with cracked ribs and three damaged vertebrae. A man barely alive, we can rebuild him...



JIM CLARKSON

New 1x1 drivetrain on his aging Cotic. Unencumbered by front suspension, a dropper post or even paint.



BEN SMITH

Chuffed a complete stranger praised his Five's ginger highlights — four years studying art and design weren't wasted then

TOMTOM MULTI-SPORT CARDIO

£199.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 62g • Colours: black, red and white, green and white • Contact: tomtom.com

With its Run, Cycle and Swim functions, TomTom's fitness watch is clearly pitched at triathletes looking for a single device to cover all bases. As an occasional runner and regular mountain biker, it suits my needs pretty well too.

The watch is waterproof to 50m and features a built-in heart rate monitor that works via an LED in the back of the unit to measure your pulse through the wrist. This works really well for running, as you can tighten the strap fully without fear of arm-pump. Worn slightly looser, for riding, it's a little hit and miss, particularly over rough ground.

A rubber handlebar mount is supplied if you're not bothered about heart rate and want to be able to read the display while riding.



Functionality is excellent and the four-way toggle switch takes you through all the menus quickly and easily. Syncing with Strava is easy via a Bluetooth-enabled smartphone app, meaning you never need go anywhere near a computer, other than to check for software updates. Battery life is good, too, with eight hours easily achievable from a full charge.

Accuracy is another strong point — I noticed far fewer missed Strava segments when compared to both my iPhone and my venerable Garmin Forerunner 110.

Like most gadgets, the TomTom is packed with features you'll probably never use, but if you're after a comfortable, rugged GPS watch, there's now a viable alternative to Garmin.

Rob Hoyles



GORE BIKE WEAR COUNTDOWN 2.0 SHORTS

£64.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 230g (Large) • Sizes S-XXL • Colours: black, red/black • Contact: goreapparel.co.uk

Gore is a stickler for detail, and these shorts are no exception. Intrigued by how easily they slid over my bibshorts when pedalling, I lifted the leg to reveal a lovely silk band round the front of the hem. Nice touch.

There are pockets on the hip, thigh and even the small of the back, all big enough to be effective, plus well-placed stretch panels for movement, beltloops and popped tethers for attaching Gore padded shorts should you want to.

The fabric is airy and light, and one of

my big likes on these shorts was the drying time. They came out of the washing machine almost dry enough to wear, and half an hour hanging did the rest. Not only that, they seem to be very hard-wearing — a wet summer of constant use hasn't even buffed the backside.

My only criticism is the length. The 12-inch inseam really isn't long enough for my taste, and with such a lightweight fabric, a slight breeze was enough to blow them even higher up the thigh. Add another three inches and they'd be perfect.

Andy McCandlish



SCORES ON THE DOORS

What **mbr** ratings mean
Our grading system explained



1-4 Something's wrong. It's rare, but sometimes a product will have a design flaw or some other weakness that means we can't recommend it. Steer clear.

5-6 OK — one or two faults but it has potential.

7 Good — worth considering.

8 Very good — for the money, we'd buy it.

9 Excellent — a slight mod or two and it might be perfect.

10 Simply the best — we couldn't fault it.

CRANK BROTHERS MALLET DH RACE

£124.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 488g • Colours: Red or Black
• Contact: extrauk.co.uk

This is the new black version of Crank Brothers' Mallet DH clipless pedal, and while it's no different to the older red pedal, I was still interested to see how the Mallet DH compared to a Shimano SPD, having spent all of my clipless life riding the latter.

Cleat set-up is key to achieving the right balance of engagement and shoe contact, but once mounted correctly, the Mallet DH really does feel like a flat pedal that you clip into, rather than a clipless pedal with a token cage. With the concave design, you can feel the entire cage, and even if you panic and fail to clip in, there is enough traction from the pins to stop your foot flying off.

At 250g, it's not lightweight, although as a bigger rider I'm happy Crank Brothers has placed outright performance over weight. It's a small point but I also prefer the colour; black co-ordinates with a lot more frames.

Roo Fowler



ALPKIT MYTIPOT 900

£25

SPECIFICATION Weight: 122g • 900ml capacity • Contact: alpkit.com

If you're planning a self-sufficient riding holiday, you want to pack light. At 900ml, this titanium beauty is the perfect size to function as both pot and mug, making it the ideal addition to an ultra-light cook kit. It's light and tough, and a standard 250g-gas canister also fits perfectly inside, which is great for space saving. It even comes with its own mesh carry bag.

Andy McCandlish



RITCHEY WCS TRAIL RIZER 35 STEM

£77

SPECIFICATION Weight: 125g (45mm tested) • Length: 45, 60-110mm • Zero rise • 1 1/8in steerer size • Contact: paligap.com

To accompany the WCS Trail handlebars, Ritchey offers this alloy, zero rise, 3D-forged stem available in a great range of sizes. The wide, 40mm, clamping area and 220° recess for the bar keeps things stiff, although this does mean you have to press the bar firmly into the clamp before you can think about doing up the bolts. Incidentally, all the steerer and bar clamp bolts are 4mm Allen key. The rear of this stem is slightly unusual, featuring angled steerer clamp bolts. This helps to reduce stresses from the clamp area to allow a lighter construction; this 45mm version comes in at a competitive 125g. Much like the handlebar, this is a no-nonsense product that puts function over form and is all the better for it.

Roo Fowler



RITCHEY WCS TRAIL RIZER 35 BAR

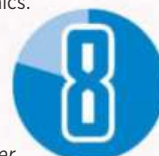
£66

SPECIFICATION Weight: 298g • Width: 780mm • Dimensions: 20mm rise, 9° back • Contact: paligap.com

At 780mm, these alloy trail riser bars are plenty wide enough for even DH, but cut markings make them easy to trim down. This 35mm version certainly felt stiff enough and there's something about the shape that made it feel wider than it really is, in a good way; they feel stable and more than up to the job. Only available in this semi matt black finish, the bars are low-key with neat graphics.

Equally, while there's nothing standout about their performance, they're solid and good value.

Roo Fowler





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DUMFRIES, SCOTLAND

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FEW HAVE
RIDDEN BEFORE



FIND OUT MORE AND SIGN UP AT
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NEW PRODUCTS

VITTORIA DEAMION PRO WHEELSET

£449.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,705g • Size: 27.5in • Contact: chickencycles.co.uk

Italian tyre giant Vittoria has been making bike rubber for decades, but only entered the complete wheel market this season. One of its first offerings is the Deamion wheel set, which is designed for more aggressive mountain biking.

Sporting only 28 straight-pull spokes, weighing in at the lighter end of the spectrum for enduro-rated hoops, and coming from a manufacturer with no history of making wheels, I'll admit to being a bit sceptical as to the Deamion's ability to handle abuse. I needn't have worried; we've hammered them in the French Alps twice this summer, on a super-capable 160mm travel test rig. Tech ed PB rode them first — at a Shimano XT launch with gnarly, ski lift-accessed trails — before I took them back for a further week on some of the toughest terrain in Europe... and they didn't skip a beat.

No noise, no loss of tension and zero reliability issues. Also, despite experiencing the dreaded sound of rock on aluminium (when bottoming out the tyre on the rim in a big impact), both wheels remain ding-free.

To boost overall wheel strength, an asymmetric deep section rim — offset by 2.5mm — helps equalise spoke angle and minimise any differences in spoke tension. Vittoria's own hub design also uses a double sealed bearing on the rear, for extra durability. The 23mm internal width rim isn't that broad, compared to the latest generation, but tyre profile and stability was decent, even running pressures in the low 20s (psi). This was possibly aided by a special rim bed profile that Vittoria calls Speedlock, which uses a ridge on the inside of the tyre bead for extra security.

Overall, it's hats off to Vittoria. These wheels certainly don't ride like a first effort, and the price is right for the quality. I'd prefer a wider rim, but stiffness and acceleration is right up there with some of the best at this price point. There's also good side-to-side tightness when slamming corners, and a light, zippy feel when climbing or sprinting.

Mick Kirkman



FABRIC CELL SADDLE

£49.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 355g • Rails: cro-mo • Colours: black/white, orange/white, pink/white, green/white, blue/white, white/black • Contact: fabric.cc

While the brightly coloured Hex-air upper of the Cell is distinctive, it serves to highlight this saddle's most unusual element. Rather than foam padding, Fabric has utilised hexagonally-shaped air pockets, designed to spread support across the whole of the saddle. Each cell can compress individually — a strange sensation when you press down with your thumb, as it sort of pops and you can feel the base of the saddle.

The base itself is made of flexible nylon and is supported by cro-mo rails. The saddle has a very supportive shape, the slightly dropped nose doesn't snag on your shorts and the wide rear is designed to offer maximum support.

On the bike, I found it surprisingly comfortable. I was expecting to feel the poppy sensation that I'd felt with my thumbs, but in reality

the broader pressure points of my bum cheeks caused a much more even compression. Only on longer rides (four hours plus with lots of in-the-saddle climbing) did I get a bit of a sore behind. The biggest criticism I can level at the Cell, is that the wide shell makes it slightly harder to slide back behind the bike on steep and technical trails.

At 355g it's no lightweight, and it's a bit quirky. But it certainly looks modern and there are no shortage of colours to match/clash with your bike. More importantly, comfort is good and it's reasonably priced.

Ben Smith



LOADED FLAT AMX SIGNATURE FLAT PEDAL V2

£89.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 360g • Colours: red, silver, green, black, gold, blue • Contact: freeborn.co.uk

Loaded makes a comprehensive range of bike components, including this AMX Signature Flat Pedal. We've tested this pedal before, but the new V2 version here is a tad lighter and is now available in seven colours.

It still has the same large (100x110mm) cutaway platform, 12.5mm profile and cro-mo steel axle, which runs on six sealed bearings and two DU bushings. There are 10 pins per side, which screw in from the opposite surface — they're a thicker design but they also have pretty sharp edges, so dug easily into my soft-soled Five Tens.

Loaded makes a big deal about the reduced Q-factor (this is the distance between the pedal axles) on this pedal, and it's able to achieve this by eliminating the spanner flats from the axle — the AMX has a single 6mm Allen socket on the end for installation. Apparently the narrower Q-factor increases cornering clearance and creates more consistent pedal engagement. I'm not so sure about the latter, but I've yet to see any significant scuffing on either pedal.

The AMX platform has a nice shape — it's slightly concave, so there's something to push against when riding technical trails, and you can reposition your feet easily if you have to dab or steady yourself in a turn.

Compared to my favourite DMR Vault, the Loaded AMX Signature flat is a tad smaller but has a lower profile. It's also slightly cheaper and has better quality bearings, which felt smooth out of the box, and have stayed that way since.

Paul Burwell



661 RECON GLOVE

£25

SPECIFICATION Colours: red, black and grey • sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL • Contact: sixsixone.com

These lightweight trail gloves offer a thin but durable palm and essential knuckle protection, with rubber lines running up the fingers for deflecting impacts. Owing to the perforated palms and mesh upper, they were hardly noticeable when riding. The mesh upper fits well and flexes effectively, and coupled with the non-slip silicon pattern on two fingers, creates a precise feel when braking and shifting. The thin palm makes for a connected feel to the bike, but don't expect any padding. My only complaint is that the wrist closures are awkwardly positioned and a little on the short side.

Jim Clarkson



SUGOI RPM X SHORT AND RC.100 LINER

£64.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL • Colours: black/green, black/blue • Contact: sugoi.com

Hailed by Sugoi as a perfect short for singletrack assaults, the RPM X had some expectations to live up to. The fit is OK, if a little short in the leg; sitting just above the knee. This shorter length gives less protection against trail foliage, and also funnels air up the leg, which regulates temperature, but balloons at speed. Although they're baggy, I'd like to see more length in the inseam and a more fitted cut to reduce this flapping. And while there are two inset waistband adjustment tabs to tune the fit, they are quite thin and have a tendency to twist.

The RPM is stripped-back in terms of features. There's a decent size cargo pocket, but it constantly slaps against your thigh if loaded up with more than an energy bar. We'd use the two generous zipped hip pockets instead. Sugoi supplies its detachable RC.100 liner with the RPM, and we found it comfortable.

The RPM X short is far from perfect, but if you get on with the more XC-style cut, it's certainly comfortable and pretty good value too.

Jim Clarkson



LONG TERMERS

Countless hours on the trails make this the ultimate test of performance as well as reliability

JAMIE'S TREK REMEDY 9 29

£3,500 / 29in / trekbikes.com

ANGLE ADJUST HEADSET CUPS
£79.99, workcomponents.co.uk



Head angle has been slackened by 1.6°, from 67.4° to 65.8°



THE RIDER

JAMIE DARLOW
Position Buzz editor
Mostly rides
Surrey Hills
Height 6ft 1in
Weight 75kg

THE BIKE

- 29er trail bike with 140mm travel and enduro-bike stiffness
- Newfangled RE:aktiv damper from Fox and Penske Racing
- Mino Link adjustable geometry to fettle head angle and BB height
- Internal cabling, 1x11 drivetrain, Reverb Stealth dropper post

MONTH 7: Geometry tweaks have the Remedy riding lower, slacker and fit for an enduro

It's hard to believe, but one tiny cylinder of metal costing just £10 is going to transform the way the Remedy rides. It might look like a plumbing job gone wrong but this offset shock hardware — custom made for my bike by offsetbushings.com — has lowered the bottom bracket height, slackened the head angle and will probably win me the Enduro World Series next year.

Using offset shock hardware is the simplest and cheapest solution to the Trek's slightly unstable feel on steep trails. Don't get my wrong; I love the great suspension and solid build, but when things get really vertiginous the front end starts to feel twitchy, and I'm worried about going over the bars. It's not the end

WHY IT'S HERE
To see if Trek, Fox and Penske have made the ultimate suspension

of the world, but £10 to make a good bike great, sounds like a worthwhile investment to me.

How does this little cylinder of brass work then? It replaces the stock mounting hardware for the shock — the bit between the shock eyelet and the frame. The new hardware has an off-centre bore for the bolt, reducing the effective eye-to-eye length of the shock and changing the relationship between the front and rear triangle, without actually compressing the shock or losing any travel. I'm basically just taking the idea of Trek's Mino-Link adjustable geometry system — that lets you flip a chip to slacken or steepen the bike — and running with it.

The bottom bracket has now dropped by 10mm and the head angle is now an enduro-friendly and slack 65.8deg. It's



Angled cups slacken the head angle but shorten the reach too

not all from the shock mount hardware though; I wanted to do a proper job, so two of those extra degrees come from a pair of angled headset cups (£79.99 from workcomponents.co.uk). As you'd expect from the name, the cups tilt the fork out of

OFFSET SHOCK HARDWARE

From £10, offsetbushings.com



The slacker head angle and offset bushing has dropped the BB by 10mm

line with the head tube, kicking the front wheel further out in front of the bike. They have minimal implications for the BB height though.

With the tweaks fettled, I'm ready to take the Remedy 2.0 on its first ride. There are some potential hazards I'm worried about though, such as the possibility I could have screwed up the geometry and made the bike too low, meaning I'll catch a pedal on every root and rock. Considering the BB height to begin with, though, it's unlikely.

More serious is the potential to wallop the rear wheel into the down tube. The offset hardware squats the bike lower, something it does by moving the rear wheel into its axle path by a few millimetres. So it starts closer to the seat tube than normal, and of course finishes closer too, potentially bringing it dangerously close to the seat tube. The only thing to do is try it — pick up these pages next month to see how it fares, and if I've won the EWS.



Off-centre bore
shrinks the shock
eye-to-eye length

SPECIFICATION

Frame Alpha Platinum Aluminium, 140mm travel
Shock Fox Performance Series Float, DRCV, RE:aktiv, CTD
Fork RockShox Pike RC, Solo Air, 140mm travel
Wheels SRAM Roam 30 tubeless, Bontrager XR4 Expert/XR3 29x2.3in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM X1
Brakes Shimano XT
Components Bontrager saddle, bar, stem and grips, RockShox Reverb Stealth seatpost,
Sizes 15.5, 17.5, 19, 21, 23in
Weight 13.74kg (30.3lb)

GEOMETRY

(LOW SETTING)
Size tested 21in
Head angle 67.4°
Seat angle 68.7°
BB height 348mm
Chainstay 449mm
Front centre 750mm
Wheelbase 1,199mm
Down tube 712mm
Top tube 618mm
Reach 451mm

IN THE SHED



Commencal Meta HT AM Race 650B £1,144.51



GT Sensor Carbon Expert £2,699.99



Transition TransAm 29 £1,899



Trek Remedy 9 29 £3,500



Vitus Escarpe VRX £1,999.99



ROO'S COMMENCAL META HT AM RACE 650B

£1,144.51 / 650b / commencal-store.co.uk



THE RIDER

ROO FOWLER

Position Photographer

Mostly rides Surrey Hills

Height 6ft 4in

Weight 87kg

THE BIKE

■ 650b enduro hardtail that's actually available in XL!

■ Slack 65.3° head angle with 150mm RockShox Revelation fork

■ Great spec for the money

■ Order online and have it shipped to your door

MONTH 7: Upsizing the rear tyre boosts comfort and control as Roo begins to embrace the fat-bike mentality

After dismissing bike test editor Alan Muldoon's idea of running a softer compound tyre on the rear and harder rubber on the front, I've come up with my own experiment. I fitted some Michelin Wild Rock'R2 Gum-X tyres, the reinforced sidewall of which says 2.25in, but they're actually closer to a 2.4in. Instantly I felt an improvement; the thicker casing allows you to run slightly lower pressures, and combined with the relatively soft compound, both grip and damping have improved noticeably. I've also experimented with some different brakes and a change of bar and stem. Although the Formula CS3 brakes have been working well enough, I'm just not a fan of their feel. The slightest touch of the lever unleashes all the power, so it's really easy to accidentally pull the lever a few millimetres on a rough bit of trail and be thrown off balance.

WHY IT'S HERE
Killer price, killer attitude and the sizing goes up to XL

The stock bars and stem are by no means a bad set-up, but it seems like on a hardtail, it's even more crucial to feel 100 per cent comfortable with your set-up, because there's no safety buffer of rear suspension travel — the smallest annoyances seem to be amplified. So with a 780mm bar, a 45mm stem, new brakes, set up precisely and to my liking along with burlier tyres, the Commencal finally came alive, and rides as I'd hoped from the start. The tyres and brakes have made by far the biggest difference to how much I enjoy spending time on this bike. Sadly, the tyres have added a big chunk of weight to the bike, but I reckon it's a sacrifice worth making for trail riding.

A quick check on commencal-store.co.uk revealed that this bike has now sold out online, but, unusually, it's also sold through more conventional retailers (albeit at a premium) so you can still find stock of this 2015 model if you hunt around.

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061 triple butted alloy

Fork RockShox Revelation RL Solo Air, 150mm travel

Wheels Sealed bearing hubs, double wall 28mm rims, Maxxis Ardent 2.4/2.25in tyres

Drivetrain Alpha 24/38 chainset, SRAM X9 r-mech, X5 f-mech, X7 2x10 shifters

Brakes Formula CR3, 180mm

Components Alpha 750mm bar, 60mm stem, KS eTen 100mm dropper, Meta AM saddle
Sizes S, M, L, XL
Weight 12.84kg (28.3lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested XL
Head angle 65.3°
Seat angle 72.7°
BB height 309mm
Chainstay 426mm
Front centre 752mm
Wheelbase 1,178mm
Down tube 715mm
Top tube 635mm
Reach 447mm

MASSIF

TOTAL DISTANCE 62 MILES

TOTAL ASCENT 2,465 M

MINI MASSIF

TOTAL DISTANCE 44 MILES

TOTAL ASCENT 1,773 M



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THE RIDER

DAVE ARTHUR

Position Writer/tester
Mostly rides FOD/Wales
Height 5ft 11in
Weight 66kg

THE BIKE

- Modern, long, low geometry with 130mm of rear travel and a 130mm fork
- Full carbon-fibre frame and swingarm with forged and CNC'd PathLink
- Well-specced with reliable Shimano parts and KS LEV Integra dropper post
- Top-end bike from five-strong range starting at £1,499

MONTH 9: Going back to square one has put the GT on a diet

Since the GT Sensor first arrived, I've made many changes to its build, with most upgrades centred around trying to unleash more of its potential. I've ramped up the fork travel, fitted wider bars, a shorter stem, swapped to burlier tyres and even slackened the head angle with custom offset shock hardware. And while the changes have netted a positive return, with more capable performance on steeper — more fun — trails, there's still something lacking with the Sensor, a feeling that it's not really fulfilling its brief.

This month then, with summer providing dry trails generally, and my rides stretching long into the evenings, I've reversed some of the changes I originally made. Gone are the slow sticky tyres, replaced with some fast-rolling cross-country rubber, and narrower bars have replaced the previous tree trimmers. With a bit of weight lost, the Sensor feels more like the lightweight trail bike it nearly is, with more zip in the way it ascends and more pop over crests and rises. It really still needs to lose weight though, and it appears GT has partly addressed this for 2016, with the introduction of a lighter swingarm. Equally significant is the fact that GT has upgraded forks across the range to a 140mm travel Fox 34. In my eyes, both are much needed specification changes that should un-tap even more of the Sensor's potential than I've managed.

WHY IT'S HERE
Carbon trail bike with a unique suspension system at a great price



JIM'S TRANSITION TRANSAM 29

£1,899 / 29in / windwave.co.uk

MONTH 8: Jim goes XC racing, where the big 29er wheels prove their worth



THE RIDER

JIM CLARKSON

Position Graphic designer
Mostly rides Sussex trails
Height 5ft 10in
Weight 76kg

THE BIKE

- 29er 'all-mountain' hardtail
- Durable steel frame with adjustable chainstay length
- RockShox Pike fork with 120mm travel
- Available as a frame-only for £499

Transition never intended the TransAm to be a race bike — but having entered the Brighton Big Dog six-hour XC race, in the name of research, I used it as just that. What it highlighted, with greater clarity than ever before, was the contrasting character of the bike. On the positive side the handling is great in all situations, and the larger wheels keep things rolling. Less welcome is the weight; piloting a 28lb steel bike around a short, hilly course took its toll after a few laps. Indeed, I was thankful to be racing in pairs, as opposed to solo. My slipping seatpost issue also continued to rear its head, which was really annoying.

The Shimano Deore componentry is starting to show signs of wear and tear, with a few rattles developing, while the Race Face bottom bracket packed up rather abruptly a few days before race day. With the miles racking up, I've also given the RockShox Pike fork some routine TLC. Just simple stuff like cleaning the seals and topping up the pressures, but it all helps to keep the handling sweet.

I've also been trying some lighter, summer tyres. This has made the bike roll faster, but I've lost a certain amount of confidence in loose corners. So what can we take away from my experiment?

WHY IT'S HERE
A reliably tough hardtail for all-day riding

Well, the TransAm is certainly adaptable, but I definitely feel it's more at home thrashing around the woods than hammering round a race course. And who can blame it?

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JAMES'S VITUS ESCARPE VRX

£1,999.99 / 650b / chainreactioncycles.com

SPECIFICATION

Frame Hydroformed 6061-T6 Aluminium, 135mm travel
 Shock RockShox Monarch RT3
 Fork Marzocchi 350 CR, 150mm travel
 Wheels Formula hubs, WTB ST i23 TCS rims, WTB Vigilante 2.3in/Trail Boss 2.25in tyres
 Drivetrain SRAM X1
 Brakes Shimano SLX
 Components Vitus Riser Bar, Funn Strippa stem, Vitus saddle, RockShox Reverb Stealth seatpost
 Sizes S,M,L,XL
 Weight 14.4 kg (31.7lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested L
 Head angle 66.2°
 Seat angle 69.1°
 BB Height 335mm
 Chainstay 435mm
 Front centre 750mm
 Wheelbase 1,185mm
 Down tube 704mm
 Top tube 620mm
 Reach 450mm



THE RIDER

JAMES SMURTHWAITE

Position Junior writer

Mostly rides

Surrey Hills

Height 5ft 11in

Weight 70kg

THE BIKE

■ 650b trail bike with slack geometry

■ Asymmetric travel: 150mm front, 135mm rear

■ Cutting-edge 1x11 SRAM drivetrain

■ Short stem and RockShox Reverb Stealth dropper post

MONTH 3: Rocky Lake District trails push both James and the Vitus to the ragged edge

I said I was going to tackle some real mountains in last month's report. As it turned out, maybe I bit off more than I could chew. I was hoping to evaluate the Vitus's climbing prowess, but the Lake District trails I tackled were only conducive to mammoth hike-a-bike sessions followed by precipitous descents with one foot on the pedal and my brake levers jammed to the bar.

Nan Bield pass, for example, sits coiled like a cobra at the head of a windswept valley. Its body — a sinuous slither of switchbacks lined with slate scales — forms a treacherous path down towards Kentmere. It was a deserving inclusion in our '20 best trails in the UK' award (go to po.st/20Best), but it's certainly not one that can be easily charmed.

Unfortunately, it also seemed to have the measure of my poor Vitus. This is my third month with the Escarpe and this is the first time I feel it's been truly tested by UK riding. Time for some changes, methinks.

The first thing that will have to go is the WTB Trail Boss rear tyre. It has a low profile

and is fast rolling, which is great fun on hardpack trails, however it feels out of its depth on slower, more technical Cumbrian trails. It constantly scrambled for grip and sapped the confidence I needed to attack the terrain. Considering winter is looming, it's time to get something a bit meatier.

Next to go will be the grips. The Escarpe VRX comes equipped with some own-brand grips that I haven't found to be up to much. For the rocky terrain of the Lake District they were far too hard and I suffered arm-pump more quickly than I expected. Thankfully it's not a difficult fix to fit some softer ones.

One positive that did come out of my Nan Bield experience was that the Vitus assuaged my worries about its bottom bracket height. When the bike was given to me, scuffs on the end of the cranks arms indicated this could be an issue. As it turns out, there was ample clearance on even the steepest of steps.

Autumn is my favourite time of year to ride, and I'm keen to see how the upgrades bear fruit as the trails lose their dusty demeanor.

WHY IT'S HERE
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 susser from
 CRC's own
 brand



Nan Bield Pass:
 nature's toughest
 test of mtb mettle



WTB's Trail Boss
 proves too puny
 for Lakes riding

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Do-it-all trail forks

A decent fork is essential for getting the most out of mountain biking and is the most important upgrade a rider can make. Here we test five of the best

Words: Paul Burwell Photos: Mike Prior, Roo Fowler

When suspension forks began appearing on mountain bikes 25 years ago, they revolutionised riding. Suddenly you could ride faster and tackle rougher terrain in more control and greater comfort. And even after all that time, their significance hasn't diminished one iota.

As the first wall of defence against roots, rocks and bumps, they help isolate you from a constant battering, and keep your front rolling forward and your tyre tracking the ground, ensuring

you can still brake and steer, even when grip is compromised. With this in mind, plugging the best suspension fork possible into the head tube of your bike is absolutely paramount.

For this test we've pooled together five of the best trail forks on the market. We ran all of them on a 29er full-suspension bike at 140mm of travel — which is still a great figure for all-round use — but many of them are also available for 27.5in wheel sizes and with different-travel options.

They may be named slightly differently, and

there may be subtle variations in stiffness and weight between wheel sizes, but internally the spring and damper assemblies will be the same. The resulting ride quality will be similar as well, which means that what we're about to say about these 29er forks is equally relevant to the 27.5in options. This means you should be able to easily compare the options if your bike has 27.5in or even 26in wheels. To help you make the right choice, we've listed whether alternative wheel sizes are available in the specification.

Know your trail fork

COMPRESSION ADJUSTMENT

Low-speed compression adjusters control weight shifts, reduce bobbing and help prop the fork up on steep descents. High-speed damping is designed to control higher shaft speeds, for example when hammering through a rock garden, or a rooty section of trail. Normally, compression dials live at the top of the fork, and some even give independent control of both high and low-speed damping.



NEGATIVE SPRING

The negative spring pushes against the main air spring at the start of the stroke, improving sensitivity and suppleness. It is either a coil spring or air — the latter adjusts automatically when you pressurise the main air chamber.



REBOUND ADJUSTMENT

This is standard on all the forks tested here and controls the return speed. It's usually adjusted at the bottom of the fork via a dial.

15MM AXLE

A 15mm QR/thru-axle adds stiffness, yet you can still remove the wheel quickly without tools. Some designs have a cam function, similar to a conventional quick-release, others just screw into the dropout.

TAPERED STEERER

All the test forks come with a tapered aluminium steerer. You cut this down to size and then install a star nut in the top, which is included with some forks.

AIR SPRING

Air is the perfect spring medium for lightweight suspension forks because it **doesn't weigh anything** and it **can be set up for riders of any weight**. All the forks use a **single Schrader valve** to adjust the main air spring. Some even come with a shock pump included in the box for this purpose.



STANCHIONS

To counter the extra leverage of a bigger wheel most manufacturers increase the diameter of the stanchions on 29er forks from 32mm to 34mm. All, but one, of the forks in this test have 34mm stanchions.

VOLUME REDUCERS

Known as Bottomless tokens in a RockShox fork. Adding volume spacers to the fork reduces the size of the spring chamber, causing it to ramp more as it moves through its travel. You can then reduce the air pressure slightly to improve sensitivity without it bottoming too easily.



USED AND ABUSED

How we test

We built up two Orange Segment 29er test mules with the same bars and stem, wheels, tyres and rear shock to isolate the performance of the fork when comparing back-to-back. We rode short loops and constantly swapped bikes to give instant feedback on how one fork performed next to another. All the forks were weighed with the steerer cut to 180mm. We then spent several weeks bedding them in before focusing exclusively on ride quality. In doing so, we tried to build up an overall picture of how each fork performs in the widest variety of trail conditions, so that when you come to make a purchasing decision you'll know it's suitable (or not) for where you ride.



DT SWISS OPM ODL 130 29

£749.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,655g • Travel: 130mm • Options: 26 and 27.5in, 100, 120, 130, 140, 150mm
Contact: hotlines-uk.com

For 2015, DT Swiss has simplified its whole fork line, even if the new acronyms are somewhat baffling. OPM stands for one-piece magnesium, and refers to the single lower leg casting. DT Swiss is one of the few manufacturers using a reverse arch, but while quirky, it does add a ton of stiffness. It's so stiff that DT can get away with smaller-diameter 32mm stanchions, which saves a load of weight.

The second acronym is ODL, and this refers to a new three-position compression adjustment — it stands for open, drive and lock. Depending on the fork, ODL is either adjusted via a lever on the top of the crown, or by a new bar-mounted remote. We were sent

the latter for test, but the remote was missing on our sample and we waited a month for it to turn up. As a result, we haven't been able to put as much time as we'd like on the new remote, but it does offer instant access to firmer damping for climbing and sprinting. At 45g, the remote is pretty light too, and there's also a two-in-one option if you have a DT Swiss rear shock with ODL.

Previous DT Swiss forks we've tested were also a bit firm at the start of the stroke, but the ODL forks get new seals and bushings to reduce this initial stiction. There is also a new two-stage NCS (negative coil spring) that improves small-bump sensitivity, but at the same times allows the fork to ramp a bit more and also reduces fork dive — another problem with the older forks.

On smooth surfaces, the DT Swiss ODL is compliant and stable, however, as the trail starts to get rowdy there's a harshness to the damping, especially over square-edge hits. The fork is noticeably less controlled than the RockShox or Fox, and we really had to work hard to stop it deflecting off rocks on longer descents.

With its low weight, firm damping and 130mm travel, the DT Swiss ODL may suit a short-travel trail bike, but it needs updating for anything with longer travel.



Standard 15mm thru-axle is used



Reverse arch adds stiffness



FOX FLOAT 34 FACTORY SERIES 29

£749

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,812g • Travel: 140mm • Options: 27.5in, 140, 150, 160mm • Contact: mojo.co.uk

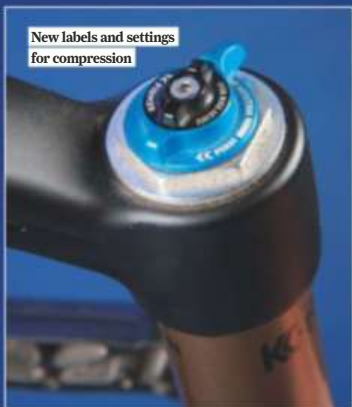
The chassis of the new 2016 Fox 34 looks visually similar to 2015, but Fox has managed to drop nearly 200g (depending on wheel size) from the fork, while still retaining sufficient stiffness. It's not quite as stiff as the Pike tested here, but it's over 150g lighter. Fox has also slashed the retail price, and this flagship Factory Series model undercuts the Pike by £30, although you can buy the RockShox online for less than £450!

The other big change is that the CTD label has now been replaced by more conventional compression settings, along with the introduction of a fourth-generation FIT damper. It still has a three-position adjuster but the Climb, Trail and Descend modes are replaced with Firm, Medium and Open. You now adjust the low-speed-compression

damping in the Open setting, rather than Trail mode — as you did on the older model — and there are 22 clicks of adjustment instead of seven now.

Fox has also tweaked the rebound, to keep the fork riding higher in its travel, which stops it packing down after bigger hits. A nice touch is that the rebound dial is now recessed into the lower leg, so it won't get scuffed when you remove the front wheel, though it is a little harder to reach. Rather than a separate air spring and coil negative, the 34 now gets a self-equalising air system. Like the Pike, it also comes with volume spacers to tune the progression and ramp-up. The Fox spacers clip into one another and feature little wings to stop them rattling inside the stanchion.

Following in the footsteps of the new 36, the 34 is also confidence-inspiring and lets you push harder and faster without feeling on the ragged edge. It doesn't have the 36's big-hit ability, but it's composed on broken trails and feels more propped up on steep descents. Fox forks often get criticised on price, but the 34 is now great value, the build quality is first rate and it's light. It does require a little tinkering with spacers and damping compared to the Pike, and it doesn't quite overlap into all-mountain terrain like its rival. Bottom line: it's a great fork for short to mid-travel trail bikes.



New labels and settings for compression



Rebound dial neatly tucked into the lower leg



ROCKSHOX PIKE RCT3 29

£780

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,961g • Travel: 140mm • Options: 26in, 27.5in, 130mm, 140mm, 150mm, 160mm
Contact: fisheroutdoor.co.uk

The RockShox Pike is available in three wheel sizes and a ton of travel options. You can also choose between the fixed-travel Solo Air, and the adjustable Dual Position, but you can also change the travel of the Solo Air forks by purchasing a different spring assembly. This is a great feature if you're planning to move the fork to another frame down the line.

All Pike forks can be custom-tuned using Bottomless Tokens; RockShox's name for volume reducers. The owner's manual includes printed recommendations for how many tokens can be run in the various models, but if you ride harder, or want to increase the progression, we recommend adding a token, as we

found this really helps prop the fork and stop it diving through the mid-stroke under braking on steeper trails.

The RCT3 model has rebound adjustment, a low-speed compression dial and three-position preset compression (Open/Pedal/Lock) adjuster. Of all the forks, it's one of the easiest to set up, and once we'd dialled the sag and added a token we never touched it again — to say it's fit and forget is an understatement. On the trail, the Pike is totally unfazed. It has excellent small-bump sensitivity, but it remains unruffled on big hits and through rock gardens. The fork soaks up stutter bumps without breaking its stride, and the Fox 34 is probably the only other that comes close in performance riding rough, jagged terrain. One criticism is that the fork can creak a little and the overall finish isn't as durable as the Fox 34.

In terms of price, the RockShox Pike and Fox Float 34 are pretty close, with the 34 probably having the edge when it comes to damping performance and control. However, the Pike is available in a wider range of options, it's stiffer and we feel it has better small-bump performance. It's a doddle to set up, and easier to work on. It's a close call, but the Pike just edges it on usability and stiffness.



Stiff Maxle skewer and rebound adjustment



Low-speed compression dial sits atop three compression presets



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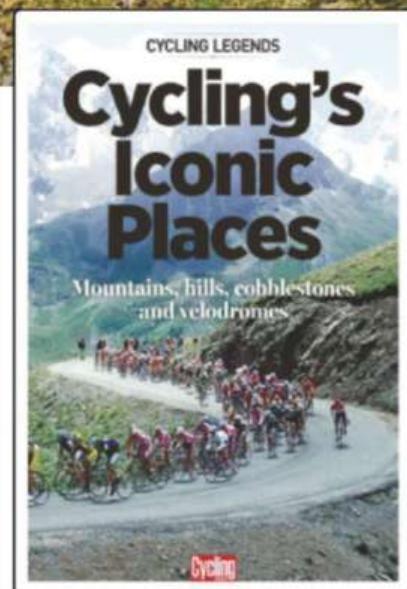
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SUNTOUR AURON

£380

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,973g • Travel: 130mm • Options: 27.5in, 120-160mm (adjustable)
Contact: greyville.com

We tested the 27.5in/160mm version of this fork a few months ago, and — like its big brother — the 29er Auron has 34mm stanchions, a stiff and light hollow-forged crown and SunTour's new Q-Loc 2 thru-axle. The axle has an expanding wedge, that you twist before removing it from the dropout. It does pull free quickly, but there's a bit of knock to the action, and dirt ingress can cause it to jam inside the hub, so you need to keep it clean.

The Auron gets 130mm travel, and uses a main air spring with a steel coil negative. Underneath the air cap is an elastomer spacer, which SunTour says can be cut down to reduce the progression. This bumper works in the same way as the tokens in a Fox or RockShox fork do, but it's really short, so you need to remove it to make

much of a difference. Unless SunTour is planning to offer different lengths, there is not actually a lot of scope for tuning here.

Inside the right leg is SunTour's new sealed cartridge damper. It's lightweight, easy to replace and fully sealed. On top are two adjustments — high and low-speed compression — while rebound lives at the bottom. There's a wide range of adjustment on all three dials, but the Auron is overdamped on both low-speed and high-speed compression, especially for mid-weight riders. Hence, it feels pretty dead, with very little sensitivity over small bumps. We had to work hard to get it to pop over jumps and obstacles on the trail, and each time it did so, it was accompanied by a noisy squelch on the rebound stroke.

SunTour has done an amazing job getting this level of sophistication and adjustment on a fork that costs less than £400, but it's gone overboard on the damping, and the one-hit air volume spacer seems like a token gesture, especially when it wouldn't cost much to have proper reusable spacers, or different-length elastomers.

The Auron is great value, but it needs a lighter tune and proper volume reducers to make the most of the ridiculously low price.



Elastomer spacer is no substitute for tokens



Q-Loc 2 thru-axle with expanding wedge



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X-FUSION TRACE ROUGH CUT

£694.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,935g • Travel: 80-140mm • Options: 26in (Velvet), 140mm • Contact: upgradebikes.co.uk

The Trace is X-Fusion's 29er trail fork. Our test sample came set at 140mm of travel, but the pin system inside lets you set the travel between 80 and 140mm. Our fork also has the new Uni-crown; a one-piece forged crown and steerer assembly. It's stiffer and lighter than the old two-piece design and has a harder-wearing surface finish — great for resisting cable rub.

X-Fusion forks we've tested were always a bit firm off the top, but to increase sensitivity the Trace has new slippery stanchions, low-friction wiper seals, a redesigned air seal and custom seal lubricant. We had a bit of an issue getting full travel — maybe due to the progression in the

spring — but the fork is definitely more sensitive to smaller impacts. X-Fusion's new Roughcut cartridge damper also features. It has a bladder design, to deal with oil expansion, and has more consistent performance and reduced friction. Both high and low-speed compression damping are independently adjustable, but the lower dial jammed during testing. X-Fusion recommended loosening it with some adjustable pliers, which worked, but it didn't feel nice.

X-Fusion's forks using the older HLR damper used to spike on high-speed hits, but the Roughcut is more controlled on square-edge hits. The fork ramps up at around 120mm, so we never really achieved the full 140mm, but it dives less under braking or when pushing hard into a turn. The Trace has the lightest thru-axle on test, but the lever is a little uncomfortable. It also has the same tiny 2mm hose-clip fixing bolt that we moaned about when we tested the 26in Velvet two years ago.

Previous X-Fusion forks we've tested didn't always work as well as those from bigger brands, but were usually better value. The Trace now offers comparable performance, but has nearly doubled in price, and it still needs a bit of tuning to the spring progression.



Hard-wearing one-piece forged fork crown



The Trace is stiffer and lighter than the old design



Verdict

Despite the travel difference between the forks in this test being only 10mm, each has a slightly different focus. With its low weight and remote compression lever, the DT Swiss ODL definitely sits at the XC end of the spectrum. We reckon it's a good fork for a lightweight 120mm bike, as the damping settings are skewed towards efficient pedalling rather than hammering.

The SunTour Auron feels overdamped. It's not very lively, and the harder we pushed it, the worse it felt. But given a few tweaks to the tune and maybe a range of different-length volume spacers, and this fork could be amazing, especially considering its price.

Historically, X-Fusion forks have been great value too, but with all its upgrades the Trace is now strutting its stuff with the big boys. The new Roughcut damper is impressive, offers a wide range of adjustment to match most riding styles, and has far better control than the older RL2 damper we tested on the Trace a year ago. Like the DT Swiss, it lacks volume spacers for adjusting the spring curve, although X-Fusion hinted that you can change the air volume by adding fluid, which is something we've done previously with Fox forks. The X-Fusion

The RockShox Pike covers a wide spectrum of riding and it's incredibly versatile

is a very good 140mm 29er fork, but the increase in price means it's no longer in the budget category, and has to be judged accordingly.

Even though the Fox 34 came second-best in this test, it's still an amazing trail fork. It's lighter and cheaper this year and is available in all three wheel sizes and with a ton of travel options. If we could have rated it a 9.5, we would.

We've tested the RockShox Pike against both the new Fox 36 and older Fox 34 CTD in the last year, and it has come out on top both times. It's obvious from this that the Pike covers a wide spectrum of riding, and is incredibly versatile, but it is carrying a bit more weight. Surprisingly, it's slightly more expensive than the Fox 34 — at least on paper — but it's stiffer, has a better thru-axle, and we feel it's a no-brainer when it comes to set-up.



	Price	Sizes	Axle to crown	Contact	Rating
DT Swiss ODL	£749.99	1,655g	540mm	hotlines-uk.com	7
Fox Float 34	£749	1,812g	550mm	mojo.co.uk	8
RockShox Pike	£780	1,961g	550mm	fisheroutdoor.co.uk	9
SunTour Auron	£380	1,973g	555mm	greyville.com	6
X-Fusion Trace	£694.99	1,935g	547mm	upgradebikes.co.uk	7

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AS CHOSEN BY...

**VICTOR LUCAS,
PHOTOGRAPHER**



Who: Rowan Sorrell
Where: Bernina, Switzerland
When: September 2008



Victor lives a nomadic lifestyle travelling around the globe covering the UCI World Cup series. He documented Steve Peat's struggle to claim the rainbow jersey, told in his collaborative book *17 Years in the Making*. He shoots video and stills for the Specialized race team, among others.

We were riding in the Livigno region of northern Italy, bouncing back and forth across the Swiss border to explore the amazing network of high Alpine trails, which thread their way around the snow-covered peaks. Far outside the reaches of any bike park, we were hoping to find some undiscovered gems here.

On this particular day, we drove from Livigno, over the Passo Forcola, and found ourselves in Bernina, struggling for oxygen on some deserted singletrack at around 2,000m altitude. It was a perfect day for riding in the late-September sunshine; the sky was cloudless, the air was crisp and dry. The mountains were quiet; we didn't meet anyone on the trails — the only sign of

civilisation was the railway line in the valley below us.

We followed this trail for a while as it snaked its way far into the mountains — a narrow singletrack formed naturally by many years of steady use. The gradient seemed perfect; it was a good challenge to climb, and with flowing descents that did not call for constant braking. We had no

idea where it went, but we kept going until our burning legs and lungs said it was time to head back for lunch.

Just as we reached our turn-around point, this typically punctual and efficient Swiss train appeared below, its red carriages set against the green, white and blue landscape.

It was a perfect Swiss moment.

**We didn't meet anyone on the trails.
The only sign of civilisation was the
railway line in the valley below us**

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